

A STUDY OF JEREMY TAYLOR (1613-67) AS  
AN INTERPRETER OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

by  
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TO MY WIFE

for whom I am so deeply grateful.

"We must live a spiritual life, for to do so is to persist in our liberty; it is entering upon that possession which God hath given us: but this is like the gift given to the sons of Israel; all the land of Canaan was their portion, but they were to fight for it, and win it by degrees; but it was long before they were in quiet possession."

-- J. T.

## PREFACE

Two omissions from this work should be mentioned and explained. With the exception of a few relevant remarks in the first chapter there is very little in this thesis about Jeremy Taylor's life, as such; nor is there any more than the briefest glimpse into the seventeenth century background. The facts of that life and the nature of that background have informed the writing at every turn. But they have not appeared openly in greater proportion for the simple and sufficient reason that the real concerns of this study, as an examination of the *precis* reveals, lie in other areas.

The phrase in the title--'interpreter of the spiritual life'--immediately suggests a somewhat specialized and limited exploration of Jeremy Taylor's thought. Inevitably, as we all know, every Christian interprets his experience of God. In so doing thoughtfully sensitive Christians like Jeremy Taylor make a distinctive contribution to the firmness with which we grasp the subtler implications and demands of the Christian life. In his case, this interpretative effort is preserved in nearly eight thousand closely printed pages which are highly varied in subject matter and purpose, parts being primarily theological, polemical, casuistic, or devotional as need, circumstance, and spirit directed. Within all of this variety, however, it is abundantly clear that Jeremy Taylor



always lived with an overmastering concern for the nurture of the spiritual life. That concern is the fact out of which this study grows and from which it draws its working materials.

This means that the entire work has necessarily become a striving after something less obvious and considerably more elusive than Taylor's doctrine. Such an analysis is not needed, for with the one exception of his teaching on original sin his doctrinal position departs very little from that core of belief which the noblest sons of the Church of England, within the flexible framework of their differences, have always shared and loved.

If doctrine, then, emerges on nearly every page, still this is not primarily a doctrinal study. Rather, it is an attempt to share Jeremy Taylor's consuming interest in the full living of the spiritual life by coming to grips with his conception of its structure and content. In the third chapter, for instance, whilst suggesting something of what he believed about the Sacraments, there is no attempt at a full setting forth of his doctrine of them. This is so just because the method employed is to consult doctrine only until it begins to point beyond itself to the larger and finer reality of a man being caught up by the Truth with which it is a doctrine's function to bring us into living contact. Basically this is perhaps best described as a study of the experience of sanctification. For two questions endlessly made their solemn way back and forth

through the corridors of his fine mind: How does a Christian grow unto 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'? Why should it be so? This work, then, is humbly submitted as a preliminary effort to find Jeremy Taylor's answers to these crucial questions.

The writer wishes to record the fact that it could hardly have been completed but for the wise, kindly counsel of The Very Reverend Principal John Baillie and The Reverend Professor William Tindal.

## PRECIS

### I INTRODUCTION

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Purpose of the Chapter:

- 1) To suggest that the seventeenth century was a time when men were genuinely concerned with the nature and nurture of the inner life; that they longed for a religious experience sufficiently inward to be convincing and authoritative.
- 2) Further, to suggest that this historic reality was operative in Jeremy Taylor's own quest for spiritual truth and that it gave to that quest added force and vitality.
- 3) Finally, to suggest that there were certain facts about Jeremy Taylor's life which peculiarly enabled him to take his place among those who shared this special concern. These facts include: his poverty, his imprisonments, his retirement at Golden Grove, and most of all, his personal suffering.

### II THE SUSTAINING ENVIRONMENT

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Purpose of the Chapter:

- 1) To suggest that there are certain basic assumptions about the spiritual life which undergird Jeremy Taylor's interpretation of it; that these centre around and inhere in seeking man's experience of his own sinfulness, his anticipation of Judgment, his growing awareness of death's imminence and immanence in all of life, his discovery--through that awareness--of the sacredness belonging to the present moment, and finally, the sense of being wanted which is the definitive quality in his experience of God.
- 2) Further, to imply that these assumptions constitute an atmosphere in which alone the personal religious enterprise can have being; that, however intangible it may be, a failure to be aware of this sustaining environment precludes the possibility of a true grasp of Taylor's interpretation, all of which is informed by it, and developed against it as a background.

Purpose of the Chapter:

- 1) To emphasize Jeremy Taylor's general concern for the spiritual life's intimacy of relationship with the whole framework of forms which surround it; and to suggest that the seeker comes into creative touch with these forms only in and through his membership in the worshipping community.
- 2) Further, to examine some aspects of the seeker's participation in the Lord's Supper, Holy Baptism, and the rite of Confirmation, and to see in that examination the quality and content of Jeremy Taylor's belief in the vitality of all the Christian forms.
- 3) Finally, to demonstrate that Jeremy Taylor also holds with great tenacity to a belief in the strictly limited efficacy of these very forms whose centrality to the spiritual life he has been exercised to establish; that this conviction springs from his insight into the essential inwardness of true religious effort--an insight which it is the function of forms to convey.

IV THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE

Purpose of the Chapter:

- 1) To demonstrate that the spirit of discipline informs all that Taylor thinks and feels about the Christian life; that he looks upon discipline as the absolutely essential and ultimate means whereby holiness comes within the realm of possibility.
- 2) Further, to show that this assurance emerges in his approach to such varied, yet closely related problems as the nature of faith and works; the interweaving of reason, emotion, and will; obedience; the ascetic effort; the Christian's relatedness to his world.
- 3) Further, to demonstrate that the whole concept of discipline finds its consummate expression in his doctrine of repentance, and to examine the implications of that doctrine which make clear its definitive place in his general view of the Christian life.
- 4) Finally, to suggest that this whole attitude brings him to the point of comprehending the spiritual life as one of unending struggle, and of looking upon struggle itself as being integral to religious reality.

## Purpose of the Chapter:

- 1) To demonstrate that Taylor's concern for holiness of life is supported and nourished by his belief in the perfectability of Christian man; that this in turn leads to his insistent demand for perfection.
- 2) To suggest that Taylor's demand for this intense moral effort on the part of man does not involve him in the error of underestimating the sheer greatness of God's redemptive concern.
- 3) To demonstrate that in every major area of Taylor's thought, holiness of life is the supreme value and reality; that this holiness is the only incontestable evidence of truth; that it is the only sure way to attain to knowledge of God; and that in this context the spiritual life becomes total.

## Purpose of the Chapter:

- 1) To examine some of the implications of that interpretation of the spiritual life which has emerged in the body of the study.

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

It is not unthinking repetition of out-worn truism, but sober recording of important fact to say that times of crisis in their external affairs make men think, and think deeply. That this is so is one of the few blessings of war. When the whole structure of life seems threatened with disintegrating collapse, or destruction, men begin anew to wonder, to search, to re-examine. Mind and heart and will respond to the pressure of events and bring to the life of man a new measure of inwardness. If it is not a universal impulse it is surely a very general one and has been felt by no small number of sensitive men in our own chaotic time.

The following study of Jeremy Taylor will be pursued with increased profit if the reader frequently ponders the fact that Taylor, along with many of his contemporaries, felt the pressure of that same impulse; and that their response to it, like our own, was repeatedly to turn their gaze away from the tense immediacies of their disordered surroundings to the inner realms of thought and feeling and experience where alone all things can be set right. We should be duly grateful to Nuttall for reminding us that anatomy is one of the seventeenth century's catchwords, and that Jeremy Taylor lived in an "age of diaries, often intensely introspective,. . . and of the earliest memoirs

and autobiographies."<sup>1</sup>

Manifestly, it was a time when all men knew much of war, and the rumours of war made ceaseless din in their ears. But in spite of the clamour--or as we have suggested, because of it--some of them heard gentler, truer voices, even when they were utterly involved in the more obvious history of their time. "When you are weary of this world," wrote Sir Francis Russell to his friend Henry Cromwell, "do but send to me and we will turn monks together. . . . The very thought of such a kind of life puts me off all my melancholy. Sir John Reynolds will bear us company, I suppose, for he talks to me of such a kind of thing."<sup>2</sup> They were not cowardly men seeking escape from what had to be faced; their common longing was to see life clearly and to see it whole by getting away into a desert place to rest awhile.

About the seventeenth century English life and thought of which these men were a part it is fortunately unnecessary, for the purposes of this study, to indulge in generalizations. It will suffice to accept only one from a man well qualified to make it. In that turbulent stretch of time, writes Dowden, two things "became more

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- 1 Nuttal, G. F., The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience; Oxford (Basil Blackwell), 1946, pp. 7-8. The thesis of this book--that the Holy Spirit was primary and definitive in Puritan faith and experience--illuminates the general point we are trying to set forth.
  - 2 Quoted by John Buchan in Oliver Cromwell, London, (Hodder and Stoughton), 1934, p. 531.



real and gravely earnest. One of these concerned the corporate life of the nation--the great contention between King and people. The other concerned primarily the inner life of the individual soul."<sup>1</sup> If these are indeed the two lodestones attracting unto themselves the real stuff of which the period's history is made, we may orient our approach to this study by remembering that it is most significantly towards the latter that Jeremy Taylor is always being drawn. And if Dowden's analysis does, in fact, penetrate to the heart of the matter it is patent that Jeremy Taylor, even in the secluded and somewhat monastic years of his retreat at Golden Grove, was in the main stream of his country's life, as becomes a man of stature. Perhaps it is no accident of individual character but truly a sign of the times that Cromwell, on the eve of Marston Moor, disappeared from the company of his fellows and was found in the unused room of an old tower, wrestling in prayer.

In Jeremy Taylor's much beloved Church of England not a few seekers after Life were bringing forth fresh, lovely, enduring evidence that the inward impulse was making its redemptive impress felt. The result is preserved in such gems of insight and devotion as George Herbert's The Country Parson, Thomas Traherne's Centuries of Meditations, John Cosin's Collection of Private

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1 Dowden, E., Puritan and Anglican: Studies in Literature, London, (Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner), 1900, p. 5.

Devotions, Lancelot Andrewes' Preces Privatae, and by no means least in significance the Devotions of William Laud, with their gracious testimony to a facet of his character which has not always been clearly seen. Indeed "it must be remembered that the Seventeenth Century was an age of Anglican piety, and remains a standing contradiction to those controversialists who have argued that the Church of England has produced no saints since the Reformation."<sup>1</sup> Clearly, Milton was not alone in beseeching the Celestial Light to shine inward and there to dispel all darkness. Many yearned that the Life of the Spirit might come to birth; and to that end they laboured.

Jeremy Taylor's capacity responsibly to deal with the realities of which a spiritual life is made was steadily enlarged by the facts and the quality of his personal sufferings. With the possible exception of his declining years in Ireland he was always a poor man. During the Civil War he knew, along with hundreds of his fellow clergy, the pain and distress and insecurity consequent upon sequestration, having been deprived of his living at Uppingham in 1644. At least twice, and perhaps three times, he was subjected to the indignities and discomforts of imprisonment, his only crime that of being on the side which was temporarily dispossessed of power. Added to all of this, he was a man to whom it meant very much to be

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1 Arnott, F. R., in his introductory essay to Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England Illustrated from the Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century; London (SPCK), 1935, pp. lxvi-lxvii.

the father of five sons; to say that he loved them deeply is immensely to understate the fact. But only one of them, Charles, for long survived the perils of disease, and even he died a few days before his father in 1667. Ten years earlier, when he lost two of his boys in an epidemic of smallpox, Taylor wrote to Evelyn what in some abiding sense is an accurate designation of the place where all his inner life occurred: "I shall tell you that I have passed through a great cloud which hath wetted me deeper than the skin."<sup>1</sup> With very little respite the cloud would reappear and cast its shadow.

If it were not so we should have been the losers. For as was previously mentioned, we are concerned not alone with the facts, but even more with the quality of his suffering. Mercifully, it was given to Jeremy Taylor to catch clearest glimpses of truth at the bottom of his own personal abyss. "As in the case of Byron, his thoughts, naturally sombre, were brought out by pain, and the height of his genius coincided with the depth of his misfortunes."<sup>2</sup> It is unquestionably true, as Worley goes on to suggest, that Taylor is at his best exactly when he is coming to grips with life's dark side, with all its enigmas of pain and struggle and death.

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1 Quoted by Gosse, E., in his Jeremy Taylor, London (Macmillan and Co.), 1904, p. 135.

2 Worley, G., Jeremy Taylor, London (Longmans, Green and Co.), 1904, p. 21.

There can be no reasonable doubt that adversity "taught him to enter deeply into the wretchedness of mankind. By the sad experience of his own miseries and the calamities of others to whose restitution he had been called to minister, he had been taught something of the secret of souls."<sup>1</sup> Not the whole secret, to be sure, but enough of it to impose upon us the obligation to understand him, to see and feel what he saw and felt, and to know again that the fullness of a Christian's entry into Truth need never be diminished by the advent of trouble, even in its crueller forms. There is not only insight but also comfort and encouragement in George's conviction that "in times of peace these (i.e., Hales and Chillingworth) would have shone the brighter, but it is to be feared that in prosperity Taylor would never have lighted his highest taper."<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, not prosperity but rather anguish and despair and struggle were the moulds into which life poured him.

This illumines what every serious reader recognizes, almost instinctively, to be present in Jeremy Taylor--an intense power to read the human mind and heart. It is one of the prerogatives of suffering to live creatively within itself; because he did that and because he was in vital contact with the Reality outside himself who gives perspective and penetration to the inward look, Jeremy Taylor

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- 1 Bonney, H. K., The Life of The Right Reverend Father in God, Jeremy Taylor, D.D., London, 1815, p. 238.
  - 2 George, E. A., Seventeenth Century Men of Latitude, London, (T. Fisher Unwin), 1908, p. 131.

knew what is in man. This knowledge brings to his best writing the tone of authority and the atmosphere of experience apart from which there can be no meaningful, relevant interpretation of the spiritual life. It is sufficiently apparent that this quality alone does not equip a man to make such interpretative efforts in any helpful way. But it goes far to equip him and does much to keep him within the bounds of plain honesty and good sense.

Since suffering is so considerably a state of the inner man the foregoing remarks will not be taken to imply that Jeremy Taylor was always penniless, hungry, and without friends. Indeed, there was one decisive period in his life when his environment ministered richly to the best that was in him, and created splendid opportunities for his growth in the things of the Spirit. After the battle of Naseby he had been imprisoned at Cardigan Castle in South Wales with a number of other Royalists. It may have been through an exchange of prisoners that he finally achieved freedom and managed to join with two friends in the establishment of a private school near Lord Carbery's estate, Golden Grove. It was probably in this neighbourhood of Llanfihangel-Aberbythych that Lord Carbery first heard the preaching of Jeremy Taylor. Nothing would do but that Taylor should become his household chaplain.

So it happened that just as he approached the summit of his intellectual and spiritual maturity Jeremy Taylor,

for eight good years, found "a private corner of the world, where a tender Providence shrouded him under his wings, and the prophet was fed in the wilderness."<sup>1</sup> It was a genuinely expansive interlude during which Taylor, not pressed for time and not immediately burdened with worldly cares, came into the full bloom of religious genius. "Golden Grove was Taylor's Rageley and Great Tew."<sup>2</sup> It was a place and a time of much nearness to God, and ever after did Jeremy Taylor bear the mark of their contact.

Not alone for himself was this temporary retreat from the world a productive circumstance. It also blessed his church. For it is helpful to remember that this time of his fullness came "when the English Church had no need of a Tertullian. In 1651 no obligation lay upon one of the hunted ministers of a fallen Episcopacy to strike at such vices as ambition, or gallantry or the greed of gold. What was wanted, in that melancholy hour, was a physician of souls. . . ."<sup>3</sup> These are statements in which Gosse has doubtlessly oversimplified the need of the church. But he has nonetheless come, even within the framework of his error, to the very essence of Jeremy Taylor's finest role.

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- 1 Taylor, Jeremy: The Whole Works of The Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor, D.D., Lord Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore, in ten volumes, London, 1850-59, p. cccxxiii. This quotation is from Bishop Rust's funeral sermon on J.T.. Along with Heber's Life of J.T., it is included in the first volume of this edition of the collected works.
  - 2 George, E.A., op. cit., p. 135.
  - 3 Gosse, E., op. cit., p. 82.

Above all, he was just that--a physician of souls. In that role he saw himself, and in it he tried to fulfil his destiny. Because this is so, he would wish us to approach him, to consult him, and in the end to judge him as those who seek healing and renewal. "My purpose", he once said, "is not to dispute, but to persuade; not to confute any one, but to instruct those that need; not to make a noise, but to excite devotion."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 9



## Chapter Two

### THE SUSTAINING ENVIRONMENT



"O God, whose days are without end, and whose mercies cannot be numbered: Make us, we beseech thee, deeply sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and let thy Holy Spirit lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days: that, when we shall have served thee in our generation, we may be gathered unto our fathers, having the testimony of a good conscience; in the communion of the Catholic Church; in the confidence of a certain faith; in the comfort of a reasonable, religious, and holy hope; in favour with thee our God, and in perfect charity with all men; through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen."

-- J. T.

"What was I before my birth? first nothing, and then uncleanness. What during my childhood? weakness and folly. What in my youth? folly still and passion, lust and wildness. What in my whole life? a great sinner, a deceived and an abused person."<sup>1</sup> Not alone for himself but for every seeker after the spiritual life does Jeremy Taylor pose these questions and give these answers. Any man, he affirms, who undertakes the quest for that life discovers soon enough that a growing plurality of forces militate against its fulfilment, and that chief in its power to impede his forward movement is this dark, dismal thing infesting the very stuff of his own inmost nature.

This conviction held by seeking man about his own sinfulness is largely experiential in its origins and sounds the note of authenticity which invariably accompanies genuinely first-hand information. It is not a generalization about his nature to which the seeker initially gives consent and then proceeds to demonstrate from the evidence of his experience. Rather it is a discovery about his nature which that evidence will not permit him to deny. His view of sin is definitively informed not so much by a priori propositions as it is by a painfully intimate process of self-examination.

That scrutiny of thought and action and feeling is a somewhat ordered process, at least insofar as the seeker

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 114

learns within its bounds to recognize and to name the varied conditions which sin is capable of producing inside a man's soul. One of these conditions is ignorance--not in the sense that he lacks information essential to the completion of his high task, but in the considerably deeper sense that he is constantly inclined to ignore that which best serves his own ultimate interest and well-being. Indeed, this is "the first natural fruit of sin: it makes a man a fool."<sup>1</sup> And it does this by blinding him to the fact that "in the whole circle of sins there is not one wise proposition by which a man may conduct his affairs, or himself become instructed to felicity."<sup>2</sup>

Blindness to this impossibility means that the ignorance born of sin manifests itself as confusion. The pathos of involvement in sin is not that we consult the sources of disintegration rather than those of renewal but

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 253

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. This passage and many others remind one that it would be a greatly worthwhile study that would attempt to trace the influence of Stoicism not only on J.T.'s view of sin, but also on his larger concept of the Christian life. Surely there is something reminiscent of Stoic teaching in his somewhat frequent references to the 'unreasonableness' of sin. The man who sins is not acting in accord with what one scholar has called 'the general nature and drift' of that cosmos of which he is a functioning unit. Thus, "it is not directly in the nature of man to neglect so great a good; there must be something in his manners, some obliquity in his will, or madness in his intellectuals, or incapacity in his naturals, that must make him sleep such a reward away, or change it for the pleasure of a drunken fever, or the vanity of a mistress, or the rage of a passion, or the unreasonableness of any sin." (Works, Vol. IV, p. 334)

that we become increasingly unable to see that that is exactly what we are doing; also that we become steadily less sensitive to the basic difference between growth and decay. It is one of the characteristic powers of sin not only to create but also to sustain a state of instability in which we do not know "what is within us, nor what ails us when we are sick, nor whereof we are made; nay, we oftentimes cannot tell what we think, or believe, or love."<sup>1</sup> It is a state in which the movement of mind and heart and will is not forward, not backward, but aimlessly circular--a movement which dizzies us by its own expanding pressures of contradiction, until "our judgments are baffled with every sophism, and we change our opinion with a wind. . . . We desire and hate the same thing, speak against and run after it."<sup>2</sup>

Confused men are insecure and perhaps above all others strongly tempted to look for, to find, and to believe in too facile easings of life's elemental tensions. And that is why sin so often wears the face not only of ignorant confusion, but also of superficiality. In their insecurity seeking men quickly learn that the too easy answers--however wrong they may be, however little of penetration they may possess--do bring a kind of contentment to those who accept them. At best, they are

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. VII, p. 286

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

usually half-truths<sup>1</sup> of our own feeble making, but even in the perversity of their incompleteness they offer a measure of the stability for which we long. And because "we so love our peace, and sit so easily upon our own good opinions, and are so apt to flatter ourselves, and lean upon our own false supports. . . we cannot endure to be disturbed or awakened from our pleasing lethargy."<sup>2</sup> This deceptive, complacent dwelling upon the surface of things may begin with a relatively harmless inclination to be "naturally curious in trifles and inquisitive after vanities;"<sup>3</sup> but like all sin it has its own unique vitality

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1 It is this aspect of sin--its tendency to emerge in those "evil principles which are sucked in by great parts of mankind"--which accounts, more than other factors, for J.T.'s willingness to engage in doctrinal controversy. By every instinct of his being, such controversy was repugnant to him. But he entered into it because he could look upon that entry as an essential part of the unending war against sin. With great keenness he appreciates the tragedy within which earnestly seeking men bring themselves "into an accidental necessity of sinning," and thus of cancelling out their best efforts, merely by embracing propositions which are too comfortable to be true. "We are taught ways of going to heaven without forsaking our sins; of repentance without restitution; of being in charity without hearty forgiveness, and without love; of believing our sins to be pardoned before they are mortified; of trusting in Christ's death without conformity to His life; of being in God's favour upon the only account of being of such an opinion; and that when we are once in, we can never be out. We are taught to believe that the events of things do not depend upon our crucifying our evil and corrupt affections, but upon eternal and unalterable counsels; that the promises are not the rewards of obedience, but graces pertaining only to a few predestinates, and yet men are saints for all that; and that the laws of God are of the race of giants, not to be observed by any grace or by any industry. This is the catechism of the ignorant and the profane." (Works, Vol. VIII, p.269)

2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 306

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 287

and must end in the wretchedness of being "pleased with forms, coused with pretences, satisfied with shadows, incurious of substances and realities."<sup>1</sup> Such is the cruel, relentless logic of growth.<sup>2</sup>

The inner security thus derived is never unblemished and must always be incomplete. For we live with a dim, but undying awareness of its origins in falsehood. And it is a further evidence of sin's strong hold upon us that our reaction to that awareness is often a willingness to pretend hatred for the very thing which, in fact, we love. Deceit gnaws at the fibre of our being, instructing us in that most despicable of arts the mastery of which enables us to "curse our sins, and yet long for them extremely; (to) renounce them publicly, and yet send for them in private and show them kindness."<sup>3</sup> The awful inner distortion from which we cannot escape appears all too clearly when we seem utterly to loathe and detest and disown our sins, yet continue "to remember them, and delight in their

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 287

2 It is essential and accurate to speak of 'growth' simply because sin is, in man, a living thing and must, like all living things, develop. Because of this dreaded potential, J.T. thinks of sin, even in its most minute proportions, as a matter of utmost seriousness. "Every degree of cold does abate something of the heat in any hot body; but yet because it cannot destroy it all, cold and heat may be consistent in the same subject; but no man can therefore say they are not contraries, and would not destroy each other if they were not hindered by something else; and so would the smallest offences also destroy the life of grace, if they were not destroyed themselves." (Works, Vol. VII, p. 97)

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 358



past actions, and bring them home to us at least by fiction of imagination; and. . .love to be betrayed into them."<sup>1</sup> This pretence is an ugly reality; for the betrayal of which it is made tends increasingly to become the substance of a law of diminishing returns. It is then that our expected solace crumbles to dust and slips irretrievably through fingers which, however tightly clenched, cannot hold it.

It is a strangely paradoxical frustration which limits the seeker's vision, at least temporarily, to the tangibles of his immediate environment and prompts him, through that limitation, to act on the possibility that there is relief in the embrace of that environment. Thus to the sin compounded of ignorance, confusion, superficiality, and pretence is added the tragically effective catalyst of worldliness. With his dwindling but never wholly obliterated awareness of truth this is the name assigned by seeking man to "the thrustings forth and swelling of his senses, running out like new wine into vapours and intoxicating activities."<sup>2</sup> As he considers "the daily experiment of his own weak nature"<sup>3</sup> he begins to understand that worldliness is the unwearied, lingering agent of dissolution which brings the processes of sin near

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 358

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 268

3 Ibid.

to completion. If it is not the best it is at least the last, clinching evidence of decay. This is sin in all of its hideously finished totality, when "care of our bodies and of our palates, and the lust of the lower belly. . . are the employments of our lives"<sup>1</sup>, (and) covetousness and ambition, gain and empire are the proportions by which we take account of things."<sup>2</sup>

If all of this does not represent Jeremy Taylor's full doctrine of sin, it does reflect his careful, honest reading of a most important aspect of human experience. It is a reading, not the whole story.<sup>3</sup> But it is a valuable reading just because it paints vividly the chains

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 130

2 Works, Vol. VII, p. 287

3 Although the concern of this study is with seeking man's experience of his own sinfulness rather than with any doctrinal interpretation he might make of it, still it should be mentioned that a full treatment of J.T.'s doctrine of sin would have to deal with the extent to which the sin of man is and is not "original." This has been one of the most controversial areas of J.T.'s thought (Heber's careful observations on it appear in Vol. I of J.T.'s Works, p. xliv ff., lxx ff., clxxxviii ff.). It seems somewhat improbable that J.T.'s view of original sin, in its wholeness, can be considered seriously incompatible with the ninth article of the Church of England. The following passage is in many ways representative and suggests what J.T. felt about the actual effect of original sin on man's capacity to engage in the spiritual life: "this I believe to be certain, that we by his (Adam's) fall received evil enough to undo us, and ruin us all; but yet the evil did so descend upon us, that we were left in powers and capacities to serve and glorify God; God's service was made much harder, but not impossible; mankind was made miserable, but not desperate, we contracted an actual mortality, but we were redeemable from the power of death; sin was easy and ready at the door, but it was resistible; our will was abused, but yet not destroyed; our understanding was cozened, but yet still capable of the best instructions." (Works, Vol. VII, p. 498)



which seeking man must always carry along as the price of movement towards the place he wants to go. This painful drag upon his every effort is not, we repeat, the finished painting. It is indeed the purpose of the later chapters in this study to reveal the whole painting in something at least bordering on its completeness.

The foregoing glimpse into the sheer, experienced reality of human bondage is important in the lasting sense that it is an imprisonment from which seeking man, on the mortal side of death, can never wholly escape. To be sure, there are those potentially redemptive moments when "the doors be open and the fetters knocked off, and virtue and reason, like S. Peter's angel, call us, and beat us upon the sides, and offer to go before us."<sup>1</sup> But even then our strength is often sapped by the perverseness which inclines us to reject the angel's offer of freedom and to forge again the chains of our own slavery. Imprisonment is, for us, an unchanging condition just because we add to our congenital weakness these crucial moments when we not only cease to resist but somehow give blessing to our greatest enemy. Than this, Jeremy Taylor is quite certain, there can be no greater slavery imaginable, for it is "the bondage of conquered, wounded, unresisting people."<sup>2</sup> It is bondage without end. And being endless, it is a part of reality which ceaselessly conditions all our questing.

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 258

2 Ibid.

It is indeed an element constituent to the atmosphere in which the spiritual life must breathe and grow and have being.

In the context of so serious a concern over the burdensome qualities of sin, it is perhaps more understandable that Jeremy Taylor lives with an equally serious concern for the experience of Judgment, and for the implications of that experience. It is necessary to use and to emphasize the phrase 'experience of Judgment' because Jeremy Taylor's eschatological interests all centre around the incredibly intimate accounting for sin which is one of the few absolutely predictable events of every seeker's future. Jeremy Taylor is fully cognizant of the suffering in this life caused by sin; but Judgment is never in his mind equated with that process of suffering. For him, such an interpretation does not explain so much as it explains away, the personal realities of which Judgment is comprised.

Taylor is quite literal and unsophisticated in his conviction that Christians are only playing with the word 'Judgment' and that they are secretly laughing at the whole concept of sin unless they construe the meaning of 'Judgment' in terms of event--that is, a specific point in or just outside of time which for every seeker is a point of crisis, and that a crisis of the highest order.<sup>1</sup> God has "so

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1 Of the highest order because of its all-inclusive character. Every human relationship is involved and in consequence, coloured by the immutable fact of Judgment. The relationship of man and wife is a typical instance: "those married pairs that live as remembering that they must part again, and give an account how they treat themselves and each other, shall at the day of their death be admitted to glorious espousals." (Works, Vol. IV, p. 232)

ordained it that there shall be a day of doom, wherein all that are let alone by men shall be questioned by God."<sup>1</sup> And that questioning, like the timing, is terrifying in its specificity. There can be nothing general about the one-by-oneness of having "our secret actions . . . viewed on all sides"<sup>2</sup> by the One 'from whom no secrets are hid.'

There is evidence of something akin to religious genius in Jeremy Taylor's ability to see and feel the personal quality of this experience. It is the painfully protracted moment when the seeker must stand in the presence of all those who withstood far greater temptation than himself, and did it with far less resources of spirit than he possessed. It is then that the seeker must cope with the agony of looking into the face of every man for whom in life he was a stumbling-block. With awful singleness he recognizes every one of his partners in sin and in an overwhelming flash of insight knows that each one is a soul "for whom the Lord Jesus died" and somehow hears a voice which says: "thou hast defeated the holy purposes of the Lord's bitter passion by thy impurities."<sup>3</sup>

Judgment is also the eternity of moment when every Christian sermon that ever fell upon his ears and every good life that ever crossed the path of his own make him wish that he had never felt their impress. For "good preachers

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 8

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., pp. 12-13

by their doctrine and all good men by their lives, are the accusers of the disobedient; and they shall rise up from their seats, and judge and condemn the follies of those who thought their piety to be want of courage, and their discourses pedantical, and their reproofs the priests' trade."<sup>1</sup>

It is the seemingly endless moment in which he has an abundance of time to contemplate the alleged pleasures of sin and to realize fully--perhaps for the first time--that they are like the paths of arrows in the air; it is then that he feels the intense pressure of that tragic possibility which has, for him, become tragic certainty--namely, that a man may "for ever perish for that which if he looks round about he cannot see nor tell where it is."<sup>2</sup>

Judgment is the distressingly expansive moment in which he loathes his ever having looked upon the slightest sin as a thing of little consequence. Then there is no more laughter at sin, for things "put on another face; and that we smiled at here and slighted fondly, shall then be the greatest terror in the world; men shall feel that they once laughed at their own destruction."<sup>3</sup>

Manifestly, this is not the whole of the seeker's experience in Judgment, for it is inclusive of joy and

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 11

2 Ibid., p. 243

3 Ibid., p. 11

reward<sup>1</sup> as well as pain and punishment and tension. Indeed, Jeremy Taylor is quite capable of suggesting that one of the most impelling motives to "a persevering, a great, a passionate religion" is the memory and contemplation of those joyous treasures "laid up for them whose hearts are burning lamps, and are all on fire with divine love, whose flames are fanned with the wings of the holy dove, and whose spirits shine and burn with that fire which the holy Jesus came to enkindle upon the earth."<sup>2</sup> This positively rewarding aspect of the Judgment experience Jeremy Taylor fully accepts and implicitly believes. But it is not at the focus of our present concern just because it is on the other aspect--the tense,

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1 There is in J.T. none of our contemporary reluctance to hold up before men the prospect of reward for their living of the good life. On the contrary, J.T. is sure that virtue carries its own reward and that the purity of a moral action is not tainted just because a man knows of this reward and lets that knowledge strengthen his ethical impulse. "God hath made virtue proportionable to all the noble ends and worthy desires of mankind, and the proper instrument of his felicity; and all its beauties, and all its works, and all its effects, and all that for which it can be loved, is part of the reward: and therefore to say a man can love virtue for virtue's sake and without consideration of the reward, is to say, a man can love virtue without any reason and inducement, without any argument to move his affections. . . . He that says a man may love virtue for its own sake without consideration of the reward, says no more than that a man may love a flower which he never hopes to smell of; that is, he may admire and commend it, and love to look on it; and just so he may do to virtue. But if he desires either, it is because it is profitable or useful to him, and hath something that will delight him; it cannot else possibly be desired." (Works, Vol. IX, p. 316) To believe in rewards is to do no more than what God Himself has willed.

2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 179

painful, agonizing one--that he is forever urging the man of quest to dwell.

It seems probable that such an emphasis is nourished by the realization that for men in the grip of sin, fear, in many instances, is a more compelling source of motivation than hope, or even love. And nourished also by the further conviction that the appeal to fear is morally indefensible only if, in the most final sense, there is nothing of which to be afraid. There is no hesitance in Jeremy Taylor's repeated sounding of that appeal to fear, for to him it is supremely self-evident that there is almost everything of which to be afraid, and not least that unalterable necessity of the Divine nature within which Jesus Christ cannot fully be Our Saviour until He has also been Our Judge.<sup>1</sup> The sources of fear are in reality itself, not in the subjective capacities of the human mind. That is why God, the Merciful One, binds us to reality "not alone with the bracelets

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1 Works, Vol. IV, pp. 15-29. Throughout this passage, as well as in numerous others, one cannot help but be aware of the extreme difficulty J.T. had in thinking simultaneously about righteousness and love, as these relate to, and are, God. Here J.T. is so consumed by what he calls "the almightiness of the Judge" as to be carried temporarily beyond the point where the corresponding wholeness of God's love can be meaningfully perceived or, for that matter, even remembered. The attempt and the resolve to see clearly at least one thing in God makes a complete demand on his capacity for vision. If the result seems to be distortion it is not because J.T.'s vision, by human standards, is especially weak but rather because there is, in God, so much to see.



of love and the deliciousness of hope, but with the ruder cords of fear. . ."<sup>1</sup> Frightened men are in the very neighbourhood of truth and Jeremy Taylor is never eager to lead them out of it.

Indeed, Taylor wants us to linger there, not because it is the journey's end, but because it is on the way to the place we are going, and because he believes "it will be an extreme wonder if the consideration and certain expectation of these things shall not awake our sleeping spirits, and raise us from the death of sin, and the baseness of vice and dishonourable actions, to live soberly and temperately, chastely and justly, humbly and obediently, that is, like persons that believe all this."<sup>2</sup> It is a context in which fear--specifically, fear of Judgment's content--becomes a redemptive force and can accurately be called "the girdle to the soul. . .the handmaid to repentance. . .the mother of consideration. . .a universal instrument to infant religion, and the only security of the less perfect persons."<sup>3</sup> The honest seeker knows, in his best moments, how accurately 'infant' describes his religion and how permanently he must be numbered among those 'less perfect persons' for whom the music of eschatology is sonorously grave, seemingly bereft of joy.

To be more exact, the seeker who is genuinely engaged

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1 Works, Vol. IV, pp. 652-53

2 Ibid., p. 18

3 Ibid., p. 109

in his quest should hear that music as a funeral march always being played in his behalf. "Let the trumpet of God perpetually sound in your ears, place yourselves by meditation every day upon your death-bed, and remember what thoughts shall then possess you, and let such thoughts swell in your understanding forever, and be the parent of all your resolutions and actions."<sup>1</sup> Failure to do this is evidence of far more than a desire to avoid unpleasantness; it is a determination to turn our backs upon the one grimly personal fact with which we must all come face to face.

"Since all our life we are dying, and this minute in which I now write death divides with me, and hath got the surer part and more certain possession, it is but reasonable that we should always be doing the offices of preparation."<sup>2</sup> And the unreasonableness of it relentlessly grows into something worse; the initial disinclination to be forever at the doing of those offices finally emerges as a perverse and cowardly attempt to alter the structure of reality. Jeremy Taylor's persistent counsel to talk and think and pray about the inevitable fact of death must be interpreted as an effort to protect seeking man against the strong temptation to create and then to believe in a lie which can only cripple its creator.

It is unquestionably one of the greatest of the Divine

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 572

2 Works, Vol. II, pp. 680-81



mercies that we are never permitted wholly to forget the strictly limited number of our days in the flesh. "God by all the variety of His providence makes us see death everywhere, in all variety of circumstances, and dressed up for all the fancies and the expectation of every single person."<sup>1</sup> While eating his dinner, a man who is sensitive to the gentle leadings of the Spirit will often ponder the strange sequence within which "every meal is a rescue from one death, and lays up for another."<sup>2</sup> The noonday meal finished, afternoon wears on, becomes the evening and while that man lights candles to drive back the darkness he understands again that "the age of every day (is) a beginning of death" and that the oncoming night "which is the end of the preceding day is but a lesser death."<sup>3</sup> And on rising from the hours of rest which were that night's gift he somehow knows that the unbidden guest was very near, that he "lay in his lap and slept in his outer chambers."<sup>4</sup>

As he moves along the path of his common days seeking man's awareness is sharpened; with a keener edge it cuts through appearance and lays bare the more substantial thing called meaning, so that he grasps firmly what in the past had always slipped through his fingers. While examining the circumstances of which those common days are made--"all the changes in nature, all the varieties of light and darkness, the thousand thousands of accidents in the world, and

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1 Works, Vol. III, pp. 267-68

2 Ibid., p. 267

3 Works, Vol. II, p. 681

4 Works, Vol. III, p. 267

every contingency to every man, and to every creature"--he hears the quiet but utterly authoritative voice of God's Spirit bidding him take a closer look and in them "see how the old sexton Time throws up the earth and digs a grave where we must lay our sins or our sorrows, and sow our bodies till they rise again in a fair or an intolerable eternity."<sup>1</sup> It is truly a mark of approaching maturity to know that "death meets us everywhere"<sup>2</sup> and in the heart to be glad for such frequency of intercourse with one whom it is so vastly important to understand.

It is the mark of a still nearer approach to maturity when these frequent meetings with death become, for seeking man, the wellsprings of urgency. As the number of the meetings mounts up it becomes increasingly apparent that "we must with all arts of the spirit seize upon the present, because it passes from us while we speak, and because in it all our certainty does consist. . . . This instant will never return again, and yet it may be this instant will declare or secure the fortune of a whole eternity."<sup>3</sup> To realize this and immediately to do something about it is the condition of continued participation in the quest for Life. And by the same measure, a man's failure to draw this conclusion from the facts of his existence makes him the just object not alone of pity, but also of condemnation.

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 267

2 Ibid., p. 269

3 Ibid., p. 275

Indeed, Jeremy Taylor can muster very little but contempt for a man who glides through life in the vessel called nonchalance, always treating sin, prayer, repentance, the church and its priesthood as trifling concerns, always assuming that there is plenty of time to examine their alleged merit. And then, with the unexpectedly early onset of crucial sickness this same spiritual dilettante undergoes a dramatically sudden change of perspective; "then the despised priest is sent for: then he is a good man, and his words are oracles, and religion is truth, and sin is a load, and the sinner is a fool: then <sup>he</sup> watches for a word of comfort from his mouth, as the fearful prisoner for his fate upon the judge's answer."<sup>1</sup> The obvious lack of sympathy for such a man is Taylor's condemnation not of his desire to die in the arms of the church, but of his indefensible failure to realize that death has all along confronted him at every turn, that the smaller dyings of his ordinary life have always spoken of the greater one which must one day be his own, and that these lesser images of death have tried so long and so vainly to create in him the precious sense of urgency apart from which no man truly lives, or safely dies.

To discover the wellsprings of urgency--that is, to find in all of life both the imminence and the immanence of death--is not an experience which brings the quest for

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 283

spirituality into an atmosphere of frantic agitation. Jeremy Taylor is no caricaturist and his pen never delineates the true seeker as a kind of busy-body desperately and somewhat chaotically engaged in saving his own soul. On the contrary, the urgent seeker is of all men the most unhurried. And it is precisely from his sense of urgency that he derives this calm, unruffled steadiness. He is not pressed for time and has, in fact, an abundance of it just because his draught from the wellsprings of urgency gives him the sense of proportion that turns a man away from those futile, worthless pursuits which do not merit the expenditure of a single moment. Distracting trivia do not dissipate his best energies because he knows that "our life is too short to serve the ambition of a haughty prince or an usurping rebel; too little time to purchase great wealth, to satisfy the pride of a vainglorious fool, to trample upon all the enemies of our just or unjust interest; but for the obtaining virtue, for the purchase of sobriety and modesty, for the actions of religion, God gave us time sufficient."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 280. This may well be one of the many passages in which Thomas a Kempis' Imitatio Christi was much in J.T.'s mind. The last few phrases suggest the sentence from the first chapter of the Third Book: "Blessed are they who are glad to have time to spare for God." There can be no doubt that Imitatio Christi exercised a very great influence on J.T.. So great that in his small devotional manual, Golden Grove, some passages (especially in the section called "Via Pacis") are direct translations of a Kempis which have been inserted in his own work. (cf. Works, Vol. VII, pp. 589-648)

The urgency informing the seeker's action is, in effect, a certain single-mindedness, a veritable purity of intention repeatedly bringing him back to the doing of those simple things which derive their immense worth from the fact that they express what is, for his life, the will of God. The sense of urgency does not make seeking man a victim of panic, for there is poise and confidence in its purity of intention. But it does make him a highly responsible custodian of a most precious treasure. And the treasure is the knowledge that "in time there is nothing certain but that a great part of our life slips away without observation, and that which is gone shall never come again."<sup>1</sup> Such is the quality of that sacredness belonging inalienably to the present moment.<sup>2</sup>

It is one of the unique privileges of seeking man to discover and explore that sacredness; but it is never his prerogative to create it. The process of discovery may be and is nourished by the human effort to sound death's depths; but the thing discovered about the present moment--its sacredness--is there quite independently of any human desire or resolve to find it. Sacredness can never claim human origins. And insofar as it inheres in the present moment, it does so only because of God's own attitude towards the whole succession of present moments which men

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1 Works, Vol. IX, p. 674

2 It is worthy of note that the first chapter of J.T.'s Holy Living is devoted to the proper use of our time, and that the priority thus given to this subject is by no means an accidental one.

call time. Is it not wholly remarkable, asks Jeremy Taylor, that the very God who, "in all instances of nature," makes such overwhelmingly plenteous provision for His creatures should be "straithanded. . .in the distribution of our time?"<sup>1</sup> Are we to make nothing at all of His giving it to us "not as nature gives us rivers, enough to drown us, but drop by drop, minute after minute, so that we can never have two minutes together, but He takes away one when He gives us another?"<sup>2</sup> Is it not manifest that God "by His so small distribution of it, tells us it is the most precious thing we have"<sup>3</sup> and that any man who hears this lesson and begins to live within the terms of its urgency has seen its Teacher face to face and felt His presence winging near?

Within a marvellously expanding frame of reference, the seeker gradually ceases to be surprised that God should approach him in this way. For as he moves and grows he feels the unexpected impress of God at a multiplicity of points; and there is born in him a deepening awareness of being sought, almost of being hunted, by another Seeker who has a quest of His own, and who will not abandon it. There is no intention at this juncture of setting forth Jeremy Taylor's doctrine of God; but there is both desire and intention to illuminate that undying sense of being wanted which is the definitive element in seeking man's experience of God. The core of that experience is the inward and

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 294

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.



incontestable knowledge that something in God ceaselessly prompts Him to yearn for the undiminished fulfilment of every human quest for Himself, and that the effort to satisfy that yearning further prompts Him to sustain the human enterprise "by arts great and many as the power and principles of the creation."<sup>1</sup>

The limitless immensity of this yearning in the heart of God becomes apparent to the seeker in and through the most varied facets of his experience. In one moment of time the insight which belongs to faith enables him to perceive the sure abundance of God's response to some prayer which he had never really believed to penetrate beyond the walls of the room where he offered it. And then it seems to him that "in all the instances of religion and providence (except only the incarnation of His Son) God hath not given us a greater argument of His willingness to have us saved. . . than by rewarding so easy a duty with so great blessings."<sup>2</sup> In other moments of time he may feel the pressure of an inner discomfort at having given consent to an ignoble course of action, or the cleaner, finer pressure of an urge to walk along some holier path. To these pressures the seeker gives a name, and the name is 'conscience.' But the naming of them never obscures the fact that they, too, are the activity of God who "rules in us by His substitute our conscience."<sup>3</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 120

2 Works, Vol. III, pp. 175-76

3 Works, Vol. IX, p. 22



All the subtle encouragements and restraints that make their felt impress on his mind and will and which tend to prevent his wandering away into confusion and despair he understands to be "put there by God immediately, that is, antecedently to all our actions."<sup>1</sup> Apprehension of this fact is accompanied by a welling up of gratitude from the deep places of the seeker's being; for in faithful response to these redemptive pressures it is known to him that "as faith is a gift of God, so is conscience: that is, as the understanding of a man is taught by the Spirit of God in scripture, what to believe, how to distinguish truth from errors; so is the conscience instructed to distinguish good and evil, how to please God, how to do justice and charity to our neighbour, and how to treat ourselves."<sup>2</sup> The Inward Teacher cares and loves, even while He guides, and the knowledge of this makes gladness in the heart of His struggling disciple.

Not always, of course, For often the struggling one must look out on the world through the misty dimness which suffering inflicts on vision. But even then he does not lose that sense of being wanted; in his pain he may bitterly curse the surrounding blackness for its empty meaninglessness. But if he does, he will soon hate himself for cursing as he sees that alleged emptiness become the very

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1 Works, Vol. IX, p. 17

2 Ibid., p. 8

substance of God. Then it is also known in the heart of man that "if our sorrows do not pass into comforts. . . it is because we will not comply with the act of that mercy which would save us by all means and varieties, by health and by sickness, by the life and by the death of our dearest friends, by what we choose and by what we fear; that as God's providence rules over all chances of things and all designs of men, so his mercy may rule over all His providence."<sup>1</sup>

Mercy, above all, is what God is made of. Mercy is the abiding context in which the seeker experiences the Object of his quest. And he knows that it is the highest quality of Mercy to be untiring, to be doggedly relentless, to be intransigently committed to the utter spending of itself in order that its loved ones may enter into Life. To this undying offer of itself, Mercy cannot and will not take from man a negative response. Even in the midst of his cruellest indifference to it, or of his most concerted rebellion against it, seeking man feels its staying power and rejoices at the impossibility of Mercy's ever being worn away.<sup>2</sup> "God shall support our spirit, and preserve

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 645

2 It is this experienced awareness which prepares the mind of the seeker for a fuller understanding of Jesus Christ. It is not within the scope of this study to examine J.T.'s view either of Christ's person, or Christ's work. But it is essential always to bear in mind that for J.T., the mercy and love in God which we are discussing at this point are inseparable from and wholly dependent on that Person and that work. "By

our patience, and nourish our hope, and correct our stubbornness, and mortify our pride, and bring us to Him whether we will or no."<sup>1</sup>

And how long does He go on yearning for the abundance of our life, agonizing Himself in the incredibly laborious struggle to make that abundance ours, addressing Himself to that struggle with "an importunity so passionate as if not we but Himself were to receive the favour?"<sup>2</sup> Endlessly: "even when we begin to be damned; even till we will not be saved, and are gone beyond God's method and all the revelations of his kindness."<sup>3</sup> It must be so, for God is He that lives eternally with an irreducible desire "to own us with an entire title and. . . (to) secure us to Himself with an undivided possession"<sup>4</sup>--so great, so infinite, so miraculous is God's mercy."<sup>5</sup>

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(Footnote 2 continued)

Christ 'we live and move and have our' spiritual 'being' in the life of grace, and in the hopes of glory. He took our life that we might partake of His: He gave His life for us, that He might give life to us: He is the author and finisher of our faith, the beginning and perfection of our spiritual life. . . All the principles and parts, all the actions and progressions of our spiritual life are derivations from the Son of God, by whom we are born and nourished up to life eternal." (Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 17-18)  
 "And besides this we have no certain place where we can set our feet." (Works, Vol. IX, p. 474)

1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 484

2 Ibid., p. 359

3 Ibid., p. 521

4 Ibid., p. 359

5 Ibid., p. 521

When Jeremy Taylor suggests "we may imagine God to be as the air and the sea, and we all enclosed in His circle, wrapped up in the lap of His infinite nature; or as infants in the wombs of their pregnant mothers,"<sup>1</sup> he is most decisively not indulging in some cheap and easy sentimentality about the nature of the Divine presence. He is not limiting God to some kind of vague, morally irrelevant identity with His creation, but only reminding us that God is inescapable. And further, that He is inescapable not because He is everywhere, but rather because "love can never have a limit; and it is indeed to be swallowed up, but nothing can fill it but God, who hath no bound."<sup>2</sup> Earnest seeking sees and grasps the certainty within which "we can no more be removed from the presence of God than from our own being."<sup>3</sup> But in the arduous yet magnificently rewarding practice of that Presence, true seeking lays firm hold not only on the certainty, but also on its meaning: namely, that love--when it is of God--is ultimately inseparable from its chosen object.

When this insight penetrates to that inner realm where the business of the spiritual life is really transacted, it nourishes love for God. And it is indeed one of the supremely blessed turning points of the seeker's quest when he realizes that the growing love he has for God is itself

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 23

2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 524

3 Works, Vol. III, p. 23

God's own creation, a response made possible by his own nature but encouraged and brought to the fullness of its beauty by the nature of God. In re-examining the whole of his experience the seeker is realist enough to admit that "there can but two things create love, perfection and usefulness."<sup>1</sup> On the surface that may seem an unflattering and dreadfully difficult admission, but it must be made. For the seeker is a weak, sinful man who cannot successfully pretend, even to himself, that he is capable of loving any one--including God--without reason for doing so. If the uninitiate--that is, those who have not plumbed the depths of their noblest passion--are inclined to praise him for loving God so fervently, he disclaims all credit and can only praise God Himself.

The love for God which fills his mind and heart and will exists not because of anything the seeker is or does; it is there, in him, because the very being of God is a rich ministry to those forces which make love come alive. The longing for perfection which creates love has found adequacy of realization not in anything he possesses but only in Him who is "immutability, eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, holiness, dominion, providence, bounty, mercy, justice, perfection in Himself, and the end to which all things and all actions must be directed, and will at last arrive."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 156

2 Ibid.

Similarly with the longing for usefulness; here again God creates the love which elevates the life of seeking man to its highest level. In the purest and most redemptively complete of all possible senses God does this by becoming boundlessly useful to man.<sup>1</sup> Partially translated into the tangibles of his own experience this means quite simply that the seeker, in meeting God, finds that "in Him is a torrent of pleasure for the voluptuous; He is the fountain of honour for the ambitious, an inexhaustible treasure for the covetous. Our vices are in love with fantastic pleasures which are truly and really to be found nowhere but in God."<sup>2</sup> If the seeker loves God, he knows it is because God makes it increasingly difficult not to love. For just in being Himself God is forever filling him with the Life which is Life indeed. It is the inevitable consequence of that which is most essential to His nature; for to be God is to be the One for whom there is no rest until the creature of quest arrives, safe in his own true country, his own home, his Father's arms. The spiritual life is not all seeking: it is also a being sought.

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1 DePauley has a fine passage in which he analyses this same point. Among other things, he says: "It is a favourite thought with Taylor that God awakens in man a recognition of His presence, a recognition which is also a response to His own invitation, by appealing to his interest in whatever he happens to find useful to him, as well as in whatever he finds valuable in its own right as an end." (DePauley, The Candle of The Lord, p. 48)

2 Works, Vol. III, p. 157



That is why a man can face the prospect of his quest in a mood of basic confidence, even of joy. It is, to be sure, a sober joy. For he never moves a single step along the way without being reminded of the burden which is his sin. At every bend he gets fleeting glimpses of the stranger called Death and knows that very soon that stranger will claim him. And it is also known in the heart of seeking man that at some point between his present position and the end of the journey there is the place called Judgment, which can not be circumvented but must be gone through. But if his confidence and joy are therefore sober, still they do not melt away into nothingness. They cannot. For above and below and before and beyond all these dark-nesses is the God who will not let him go. "And from hence you may also infer that those who sink under a persecution, or are impatient in a sad accident, they put out their own fires which the Spirit of the Lord hath kindled, and lose those glories which stand behind the cloud."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 342



## Chapter Three

### THE SURROUNDING FORMS

"There is a bodily and a carnal part,  
an outside and a cabinet of religion,  
in christianity itself."

-- J.T.

It is sometimes regarded as an open question whether the Christian life is more adequately nourished in public or in private acts of worship; indeed, by some, whether any kind of co-operative participation in a worshipping community is a precondition of significant personal growth in things spiritual. This important question did concern Jeremy Taylor, but he never imposed upon his approach to it the limited perspective of one who feels compelled to find truth in only one of its alternative answers. "Private devotions and secret offices of religion are like refreshing of a garden with the distilling and petty drops of a water-pot; but addresses to the temple, and serving God in the public communion of saints, is like rain from heaven."<sup>1</sup> Manifestly, insofar as it is a dilemma at all, he embraces both its terms.

But never with anything like an equality of vigour. To be sure, in either case it is God and only God who builds up within a man the materials requisite for a spirituality of genuine abundance. Yet the difference between the two types of nourishment is not simply quantitative. It is not just accidental that God gives more of Himself to a man who seeks Him in a togetherness with other believers than to a man who seeks Him in solitude. Rather it is an abiding consequence of the Divine will, of God's own determination, while responding to and honouring every

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 160

seeking of Himself, especially to sustain those whose quest is significantly corporate. God, that is to say, "does not give emissions and miracles from heaven to no purpose, and to no necessities of His church."<sup>1</sup> And it is a disinclination which emerges not because He is arbitrary but because it is His nature to be faithful, dependable, worthy of trust. He has promised Himself, "but the promise of the Spirit is made to the church in general, to her in her united capacity, to the whole church first, then to particular churches, then in the lowest seat of the category to single persons."<sup>2</sup> Only at the price of altering Himself, that is, of becoming something less than God, could these terms of His involvement be changed.

This does not imply or even vaguely suggest that seeking Him in the togetherness of His own appointment is necessarily impersonal, or that it becomes increasingly an experience of lessening intensity as the body of believers grows--as if God were limited and had to ration Himself out. A man who seeks Him in community with others never becomes any less 'a single person,' nor does he receive, as it were, any less of God. But, that which the terms of God's self-giving do imply is quite simply this: that what is given to a group--given with an infinity of love and wisdom--can never be the possession of any individual who tries to complete his quest in isolation from that group.

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 601

2 Works, Vol. V, p. 285

No unchanging certainty of full participation in the life of God inheres in belonging to the select group, for such an automatic assurance would rob the seeking effort of its moral content. But there is a limited and in some real sense, saving assurance that "we have title to the promises by being members of the church, and in the communion of saints,"<sup>1</sup> and even further, that a man "shall never be left or forsaken, and the Spirit of God will never depart from him, as long as he remains in, and is of,"<sup>2</sup> that very communion. Participation in that fellowship is essential to the fulfilment of his most perfect longings, precisely because it is only there, within it, that God Himself dwells fully and redemptively.

It is characteristic of that participation that it makes restrictions upon the seeker's freedom of action. For the fellowship in which he finds the living content of his holiest desires is itself the possessor of authority to direct some aspects of his effort. "In all things where Christ hath made no law, the church hath liberty to do that which is most for the glory of God and the edification of all Christian people."<sup>3</sup> Such authority as she gleans from this liberty is, however, strictly limited;<sup>4</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. V, p. 285

2 Works, Vol. VI, p. 348

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 92

4 J.T. was more keenly aware of this limitation than is sometimes recognized. Some men who have studied him extensively, such as Principal Tulloch, have quite rightly emphasized what may broadly be called his 'medievalism', although it is a most misleading term.

(Continued on next page).

for even in those instances when Christ has not been explicit, the condition of her continued life is a faithfulness which permits the making of "no law of divine worship or divine propositions, of faith or manners, but what she hath received from Christ and His apostles."<sup>1</sup>

This demand upon her faithfulness to Him has its issue in the fact that whenever the church makes her

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(Footnote 4 continued)

One aspect of this tendency is J.T.'s unvarying inclination to weave the fathers and schoolmen into the structure of nearly every argument, and elaborately to embellish his point with their testimony. By this usage, however, we should not be led into the error of supposing that J.T. is unaware of the fact that tradition, in all its forms, is highly fallible. In Liberty of Prophesying (Works, Vol. V, pp. 341-602), for instance, his whole advocacy of religious toleration springs in great measure from the admittedly uncertain, often conflicting, and consequently unreliable testimony of councils, fathers, etc. It is a somewhat negative approach which advocates toleration, at least in the first instance, because there is no admissible basis for its opposite.

Another instructive instance of his insight into the strictly limited usefulness of tradition is found in his discussion of the role played by tradition in the experiences through which the Scriptures become, for the believer, the full Word of God, and therefore all "that is of necessity to be preached to the church." On this important question he has this to say: "the traditions concerning scripture itself being extrinsical to scripture, are also extrinsical to the question: and supposing that tradition were the only instrument of conveying scripture to us; yet that tradition must not, cannot possibly be any part of the question, for scripture must be supposed as delivered to us and accepted for the word of God, before we can enquire whether this scripture so delivered be all the word of God or no. And indeed tradition of scripture is the hand that reaches forth this repository of the divine word, but itself is not directly any part of it; it ministers to the will of God, but is no part of the matter of it: and therefore the common pretence for the necessity of tradition besides Scripture . . . will come to nothing." (Works, Vol. IX, pp. 612-13).

1 Works, Vol. X, p. 271

authoritative impress upon the seeker's life "she only does it as a mother and a physician to souls. . . that the man may be recovered from the snare of the enemy, that she may destroy the work of the devil, that the sinner may become a good Christian."<sup>1</sup> The relationship of the church to seeking man is not that of an omnipotent prince to his unthinkingly obedient servant, nor of an infallible dictator to his frightened and obsequious supporter. Rather it is a relationship of the guide to him who is lost, of the physician to him who is ill, of the teacher to him who longs for truth, and of the friend to him who can no longer believe that there is love at the heart of things. Her authority over the seeker is not mechanical, but moral, and suffers no diminution for being wedded to tenderness and compassion and humility.

In order that its potentialities for good may be realized, and that its benevolent influence upon Christian man's life may be fully exerted, this authority is exercised by a body of men who are themselves seeking members of the worshipping community. In some deeply true sense these men stand between God and the remainder of the believing fellowship, not because they are possessed of inherent moral superiority over the others, but because God, in the mystery of His wisdom, has chosen, through them, "to comfort the comfortless, to instruct the ignorant, to reduce the wanderers, to restore them that are overtaken in a fault, to

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 195



reconcile the penitent, to strengthen the weak and to encourage their labours, to advise remedies against sins, and to separate the vile from the precious, to drive scandals far from the church, and as much as may be to secure the innocent lambs from the pollutions of the infected."<sup>1</sup> Always God is moving through these selected men into the lives of all those whom He loves.

The priest--for that is what one of the selected men is called--thus becomes a figure of vital importance to his fellow-members in the worshipping community precisely because "he does that by his ministry which God effects by real dispensation."<sup>2</sup> The power which he exerts over Christian man "is not vis but facultas, not an inherent quality that issues out actions by way of direct emanation,"<sup>3</sup> but it is power, in and through which he, the priest, "gives the Spirit not by authority and proper efflux, but by assisting and dispensing those rites and promoting those graces which are certain dispositions to the receiving of Him."<sup>4</sup>

This does not mean, for instance, that the attempt to open up other human lives to the power of God through intercessory prayer can be efficacious only when it is, in the strictest sense, a priestly effort. Yet, at its very minimum, it does mean that "God hath appointed the priest

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 446

2 Ibid., p. 452

3 Works, Vol. I, p. 44

4 Works, Vol. VII, p. 452

to pray for the people, and because He hath made it to be his ordinary office and employment, He also intends to be seen in that way which He hath appointed and chalked out for us; his prayer, (i.e., the priest's) if it 'be found in the way of righteousness,' is the surer way to prevail in his intercessions for the people."<sup>1</sup> Or again, if a participant in the search for spirituality yearns for the forgiveness of his sin, his priest, by the ultimate standard of judgment, is quite powerless to give him the incontestably real thing which his inner man demands; for "we must know that God hath not put the salvation of any man into the power of another."<sup>2</sup> Yet there is a less ultimate criterion in terms of which the priest can fulfil his desire by giving pardon, "not as a king does it; nor yet as a messenger; that is, not by way of authority and real donation; nor yet only by declaration: but as a physician gives health; that is, he gives the remedy which God appoints; and if he does so, and if God blesses the medicines, the person recovers, and God gives the health."<sup>3</sup> The spiritual life is not impossible of attainment without the help of these selected men whose function it is to 'dispense those rites' and 'promote those graces' designed to sensitize the human spirit to God; yet, through the morally responsible exercise of their unique authority the certainties which comprise that life are made greatly

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 80

2 Ibid., p. 82

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 452

more accessible.

At this point we must clarify the purpose of the foregoing observations about the existence and the authority of that believing community within whose bounds Christian man must conduct the enterprise in which he is so highly engaged. These observations are not intended to represent Jeremy Taylor's doctrine of the church; much less to summarize his defence of episcopacy,<sup>1</sup> or to analyse the nature of his belief in ecclesiastical authority. On the contrary, they are intended to take us behind and in some real sense beyond these and related doctrines to the point where we may comprehend his more general, and perhaps deeper, concern for the spiritual life's intimacy of relationship with the whole framework of forms which surround it and provide its protective milieu. It is a concern arising from his awareness that the spiritual life does not,

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1 J.T. was, of course, considerably concerned to "assert episcopacy against the Aerians, and Acephali, New and Old" and did write a lengthy treatise in his attempt to do so. (Works, Vol. V, pp. 1-220) From the standpoint of reasoned argument, Bishop Heber (in his Life of J.T.) places it among the weakest of J.T.'s writings: "Of the arguments which he has advanced in favour of an institution which through life he regarded with more than common veneration, there are not many which strike me as new; and in the few particulars where he has taken a different ground from that generally occupied by the assertors of episcopal government, I am not sure that he has been fortunate." (Works, Vol. I, p. clix) It is possible that this 'weakness' reflects not so much J.T.'s inability to construct sound theological argument as it does his feeling that the defence of his beloved church must ultimately be conducted on other ground. In any event, it is clear that the assertion of episcopacy simply could not evoke the best qualities of his mind.

and his pervasive conviction that it cannot, develop in a vacuum. The presence of these forms--that is, of material media which are at once the conditions and the techniques of growth--is not an accident but an intrinsic necessity and a fact, therefore, whose meaning it is of utmost importance to ascertain.

And the first clue to their meaning is that the seeker finds them within the worshipping community. Our preliminary observations have been about his participation in the body of believers not because the church itself is the form with which we are largely concerned, but because the church is the custodian of those forms which must primarily engage us. It is true that "God's spirit is given to all that ask it, and the promises of the gospel are verified to all that obey the gospel of Jesus"<sup>1</sup> just because God is God, and He is faithful. But it is equally true that this essential process of inward verification cannot even approach completion outside the fellowship which the gospel of Jesus creates.

For in addition to that sharing of Himself which is the certain issue of all earnest human desire for truth, "God hath appointed sacraments and solemnities by which the promises and blessings are ministered more solemnly, and to greater effects."<sup>2</sup> And however full of complexity these 'sacraments and solemnities' may be, there is at least one

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1 Works, Vol. I, p. 44

2 Ibid.

fact about them so blessedly simple as to be quite outside the realm of controversy; namely, that they have no existence outside the church and can therefore be experienced only within it. In any context other than that of the believing community within which Jesus established them, the Lord's Supper and Holy Baptism--to mention the two forms of most crucial significance--are manifestly emptied of all content. If it is only within the creative framework of the church that the God-guest can develop fully, it is largely consequent upon the unalterable fact that the church alone can bring a man into living contact with those media in which the life--that is, the experienced love and power and righteousness--of God is uniquely accessible. Such is the quality of conviction which nourishes not only Jeremy Taylor's general belief in the church, but also his more specific belief in the necessity of its forms--Sacraments, Scriptures<sup>1</sup>, ministry, creeds,

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1 Although J.T.'s doctrine of the Scriptures does not directly concern us here, it is well to remember that they always maintain, in his mind, their own distinctive priority over other sources of authoritative guidance, such as the creeds, the councils, the fathers, etc. The following passage is indicative in a general way of the relative importance which he assigns to the Scriptures. "For the religion of our church is therefore certainly primitive and apostolic, because it teaches us to believe the whole scriptures of the Old and New testament, and nothing else as matter of faith; and therefore unless there can be new scriptures, we can have no new matters of belief, no new articles of faith. Whatsoever we cannot prove from thence, we disclaim it, as not deriving from the fountains of Our Saviour. We also do believe the apostles' creed, the Nicene with the additions of Constantinople, and that

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rites, liturgies.

The very listing of them suggests that the forms themselves are not all equally worthy as objects of belief. Some of them possess the authority of Christ's own institution; others, although considered by Jeremy Taylor to be expressive of His will and life, are undeniably human in their origin. If he cannot, therefore, assign to all of them anything bordering on an equality of importance, still it is imperative that we should retain that facet of his insight which perceives them all as constituent and intimately related parts of the spiritual life's essential framework--a framework built of forms, of tangible ways of seeking which God in His mercy uses for the perfecting of man's relatedness to Himself.

There are some aspects of the believer's participation in the Lord's Supper which will more adequately indicate something of the manner in which God so effects His purposes through the use of forms, and of the resulting intensity with which Jeremy Taylor believes in the characteristically Christian ones. In common with all forms it is

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(Footnote 1 continued).

which is commonly called the symbol of S. Athanasius; and the four first general councils are so entirely admitted by us, that they, together with the plain words of scripture, are made the rule and measure of judging heresies amongst us; and in pursuance of these it is commanded by our church that the clergy shall never teach anything as matter of faith religiously to be observed, but that which is agreeable to the Old and New Testament, and collected out of the same doctrine by the ancient fathers and catholic bishops of the church." (Works, Vol. VI, p. 182)



a quality of this one--and supremely of this one--to strengthen the weakness of our hold on truth by bringing truth into the realm where, at least in a measure, it can be apprehended by our ordinary senses; "by seeing the signs of what we believe, our very senses are incorporated into the article."<sup>1</sup> In and through the form that which in its essence is intangible is made so available as to be seen and touched and, in this case, even eaten. "Here the word of God is made our food in a manner so near to our understanding, that our tongues and palates feel the metaphor and the sacramental signification."<sup>2</sup>

This does not mean that the form's tangible evidences are so overwhelming as to vitiate the necessity of faith, in its most purely spiritual sense. It only means that the exercise of faith is not inconsistent with a reliance upon the material order and that there is, as a result, hope for men who have discovered in the crucible of their own experience how terribly difficult that exercise can sometimes be. It only means that "as in all the other ministries evangelical we eat Christ by faith, here we have faith also by eating Christ. Thus eating and drinking is faith; it is faith in mystery and faith in ceremony; it is faith in act and faith in habit."<sup>3</sup> It is faith which finds man where he is and flourishes within the order of reality which, if not ultimate, has at least the lesser

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 33

2 Ibid., p. 23

3 Ibid., p. 23



virtue of being the one best known to man.

Thus the participant's experience of the Sacrament is, in a most penetrating way, a discovery of God-given intimacy between what he had mistakenly suspected to be the irreconcilable realms of spirit and matter. He begins deeply to understand the magnificently literal sense in which "this is a ministry of grace by bodily ceremonies, and conveys spiritual blessings by temporal ministrations."<sup>1</sup> And it is against the background of this perception that the reality of his union with Christ, in and through the Sacrament, becomes not only credible but increasingly apparent. It is creative of an atmosphere in which, if he cannot fully understand with his mind, he can at least fully accept the wondrous paradox in whose terms that union must always be expressed. For the resistance to full acceptance inherent in his former ignorance is dissipated by a knowledge which gets beyond the reach of a purely rational perception.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 41

2 This emphasis upon the seeker's experience of Christ's presence, in contrast to his reasoned consent to any proposition about the exact nature and quality of that presence reflects the centre of J.T.'s concern about the Sacrament. It is true that he wrote prolifically to disprove the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation and to establish the Church of England as being "to the most real purposes and in the proper sense of scripture the more real defenders of the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament." (Works, Vol. VI, p. 15 ff.) This immense effort notwithstanding, it seems clear enough that J.T.'s belief in the 'real presence' rests, at its deepest level, upon an experience, rather than upon a doctrine of the Sacrament. "Dispute not concerning the secret of the mystery and the nicety of the manner of Christ's presence; it is sufficient to thee that Christ shall be present to thy soul as an instrument of grace, as a pledge of the resurrection, as the earnest of glory and immortality, and a means of many intermedial blessings, even all such as are necessary for thee and are in order to thy salvation." (Works, Vol. III, p. 218)

When the first element of the Sacrament is offered to him he is conscious of a new freedom and finds that he can move, without inhibition, toward the centre of that mystery within which "it is bread, and it is Christ's body: it is bread in substance, Christ in the Sacrament;"<sup>1</sup> and having entered that mystery his experience testifies that "Christ is as really given to all that are truly disposed, as the symbols are; each as they can; Christ as Christ can be given; the bread and wine as they can, and to the same real purposes to which they are designed."<sup>2</sup> His movement toward the centre of the mystery is not simply rational or volitive or emotional but is inclusive of all these faculties. It is a totality within which hope and probability have been transmuted into certainty--specifically the certainty whose essential content is that "we receive Christ; we are, . . . after a most real and admirable manner, made all one with Christ."<sup>3</sup>

This discovered, yet given, oneness with Christ is never fusion or identity. For Jeremy Taylor is no mystic<sup>4</sup> and is never inclined to forget, as mystics sometimes are,

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1 Works, Vol. VI, p. 14

2 Ibid.

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 76

4 Indeed, he takes an extremely sceptical view of the more or less characteristic approach to the religious life which had come to be associated with the term 'mystical.' More than once one finds him alluding to "the books of mystical theology, which have in them the most high, the most troublesome, and the most mysterious nothings in the world, and little better than the effluxes of a religious madness." (Works, Vol. IX, p. 275)

that nothing--not even Incarnation--obliterates the ultimate distinction between the Creator and the whole created order which He brings into being. But this oneness, because it is something different from complete identity, is no less actual, no less intimate. If, for instance, the Sacrament is in some sense a sacrifice,<sup>1</sup> and if it is genuinely a ministry to human sinfulness, it is so only in virtue of the intensely personal fact that the participants "receive Christ within them, and therefore may also offer Him to God, while in their sacrifice of obedience and thanksgiving they present themselves to God with Christ, whom they have spiritually received, that is, themselves with that which will make them gracious and acceptable. The offering their bodies and souls and services to God, in Him, and by Him, and with Him, who is His Father's well-beloved. . . cannot but be accepted to all the purposes of blessing, grace, and glory."<sup>2</sup> It is that closeness to Him which brings to the Sacrament its redemptive quality.

The incontestably genuine character of that closeness is well indicated by its benevolent effect not alone upon the seeker's soul--an effect often assumed by Christian people to be the Sacrament's sole area of impress--but also upon his very body. Even his bone and muscle participate; for God, "in making the symbols to be the instruments of conveying Himself to the spirit of the

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1 See, for example, Works, Vol. II, pp. 643-4  
 2 Works, Vol. III, p. 215

receiver. . .nourishes the soul with bread, and feeds the body with a sacrament; He makes the body spiritual by His graces there ministered."<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Taylor is unashamedly literal in expressing his conviction that along with its spiritual blessings, "there is something also of temporal regard directly provided for our bodies by the holy sacrament. It sometimes is a means in the hand of God for the restoring and preserving respectively of our bodily health and secular advantages."<sup>2</sup>

This conviction about the body must be seen and interpreted not as a tacit subtraction of emphasis from the Sacrament's essentially inward and spiritual nature but rather as a perfectly legitimate concentration of emphasis upon the Sacrament's totality--a totality from which no portion of the participant's being may be excluded. And

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 640. A most interesting and altogether significant corollary to this bodily involvement in the Sacrament is J.T.'s conviction that the body is, in an intensified degree, the dwelling place of God not just during the communion service but also during that subsequent period of hours in which the consecrated elements remain within it. Such is the source of this counsel: "After thou hast received that pledge of immortality and antepast of glory, even the Lord's body in a mystery, leave not thy Saviour there alone, but attend Him with holy thoughts and colloquies of prayer and eucharist. . . It were well that so long as the consecrated symbols remain within us, according to the common estimate, we should keep the flame bright, and the perfume of an actual devotion burning, that our communion be not a transient act, but a permanent and lasting intercourse with Our Lord." (Works, Vol. II, p. 654)

2 Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 41-42

the crowning evidence of that totality must surely be found in the fact that within the sacramental experience our bodies are not only nourished towards physical well-being, but so indwelt by Christ as to be "made capable of the resurrection to life and eternal glory."<sup>1</sup> Such is at least an important part of the complete and utterly personal sense in which the seeker comes to understand the Lord's Supper as an "earnest of immortality,"<sup>2</sup> and to approach it not as a lifeless bit of religious machinery but as the creative and recreative form which presents to him "as great a thing as God could give; for it is impossible anything should be greater than Himself."<sup>3</sup>

To a form which has in it such immeasurable vitality the earnest seeker will frequently return,<sup>4</sup> knowing that a man who "loathes good meat is sick at heart, or near it; and he that despises, or hath not a holy appetite to the food of angels, the wine of elect souls, is fit to succeed the prodigal at his banquet of sin and husks."<sup>5</sup> But there is

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 40

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 645

3 Ibid., p. 637

4 ". . . it is without peradventure very much better to receive it every day, than every week; and better every week, than every month." (Works, Vol. VIII, p. 184)

"There is no greater external testimony that we are in the Spirit and that the Spirit dwells in us, than if we find joy and delight and spiritual pleasures in the greatest mysteries of our religion; if we communicate often, and that with appetite, and a forward choice, and an unwearied devotion and a heart truly fixed upon God and upon the offices of a holy worship." (Works, Vol. IV, p. 338)

5 Works, Vol. IV, p. 338



far more in his return than a mere increase in frequency; for the wholeness of the form's ministry to his need inevitably evokes its own counterpart; namely, a new desire to be wholly ready for the redemptive impact of this "most perfect and consummate. . . union of mysteries."<sup>1</sup> If a growing urgency informs his preparation, ennobling its quality and heightening its intensity, it is precisely because he perceives that the response prerequisite to significant participation in such a total experience is not simply "the act of faith, but the body of faith; not only believing the articles, but the dedication of our persons; not only a yielding up of our understanding, but the engaging of our services; not the hallowing of one faculty, but the sanctification of the whole man."<sup>2</sup>

The seeker knows that the Sacrament is holy ground exactly because God Himself has chosen to stand upon it and there to meet and bless His creature. For the questing man also to stand upon it is therefore a most serious affair. And while the foregoing considerations upon it in no way pretend to summarize all that Jeremy Taylor looks upon as the content of that seriousness, still they should suffice "to produce reverence, humility, and submission of our understanding to the immensity of God's unsearchable abysses."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they should also suffice as indicators of the extent to which Jeremy Taylor believes not

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 637  
 2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 114  
 3 Works, Vol. II, p. 641

alone in the desirability but in something more akin to the indispensability of the sacramental form. We have explored those aspects of the seeker's experience which enable us to grasp that abiding sense in which the form--however structural, however involved in the material order, and indeed to some considerable extent because of that involvement--is not just a form, but a medium for the inflow of Divine Life. Such is the source of its importance to the striving Christian believer, and such the reality prompting Jeremy Taylor to rename the form and in various contexts to call it "the prodigy of a miraculous power. . .the object of wonder and adoration. . .the word of life."<sup>1</sup>

This characteristic confidence in the vitality of forms is by no means confined to the Lord's Supper. It can also be identified and traced in the believer's baptismal experience. Here again we are dealing with a portion of the spiritual life's enveloping framework, with one of its divinely prescribed techniques of growth, with one of its 'forms.' To be sure, we are dealing with a form built into the very foundation of spirituality. For baptism is that empowering prelude which does not simply precede, but in the exercise of its wondrous prerogative somehow actually creates the rest of the music. And here again, as in the other Sacrament, because of its being a part of the foundation--that is, for being a form--its stones are no less living ones; they manifest their

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 641



livingness by extracting the spiritual life from the realm of pure concept and planting it firmly in the blessed ground of possibility.

In the first instance, Baptism does this because it is God's own way of ministering to our tragic isolation from the sources of spirituality. To be baptized is to be claimed by God. "The descent of the Holy Spirit upon us in our baptism is a consigning or marking us for God, as the sheep of His pasture, as the soldiers of His army, as the servants of His household. We are so separated from the world that we are appropriated to God."<sup>1</sup> To be baptized is to be made His; it is full admission into the living environment of Spirit in which isolation from Himself is overcome. And if it is not a complete adjustment to nor a full absorption of that uniting environment, baptism is, at its very minimum, "an instrument of our . . . being in a condition of obtaining that supernatural end which God at first designed to us,"<sup>2</sup> but which we, in our separateness from Him, could not see, or even believe to exist.

The baptismal gift of the Spirit is also a ministry to our lack of faith, for it inheres in the nature of this inward Visitor to dispel the darkness which nourishes disbelief and to be, in His claimed ones, "light or illumination; that is, the Holy Spirit becomes unto us the author of holy thoughts and firm persuasions. . . (He) makes faith

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. II, p. 241

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

to be a grace, and the understanding resigned, and the will confident, and the assent stronger than the premises, and the propositions to be believed because they are beloved."<sup>1</sup> And insofar as our faithlessness is ignorance, we are taught, by the miracle of His indwelling, "the ways of godliness after a new manner, that is, we are made to perceive the secrets of the kingdom, and to love religion, and to long for heaven and heavenly things, and to despise the world, and to have new resolutions, and new perceptions, and new delicacies, in order to the establishment of faith and its increments and perseverance."<sup>2</sup>

But the Spirit who comes in and through the form is more than light to the seeker; He is also power, a very "principle of new life. . . a holy seed springing up to holiness."<sup>3</sup> And it is this fact which moves the baptismal form into a larger and truer perspective where we can see it as one of God's chosen ways for addressing Himself to the vast problem created by our denial and rejection and sheer rebellion against the Love that would make us whole and well. Baptism is not a ministry to our sinfulness in the sense that God arbitrarily cancels out what is past and hopes, not too confidently, that all will be better by and by. But it does execute that ministry in the far more redemptive sense that "we have a new life of righteousness put into us,

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 242

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

we are quitted from the dominion of sin, and are planted together in the likeness of Christ's resurrection, that henceforth we should not serve sin."<sup>1</sup> And so the baptized seeker, having felt the form's creative touch, progresses towards the insight that speaks to him of forgiveness which is not simply a Divine attitude toward what has passed but also a Divine provision for what is yet to come--a self-giving on the part of God, a very sharing of His own life and His own power in order that the final victory may be assured.

Baptism, that is to say, is not only event but also process. Not alone for its initially redemptive consequence but also for the continuing impress of this sacramental form are we to praise God's Name, for it "hath also influence upon the following periods of our life, and hath admitted us into a lasting state of pardon, to be renewed and actually applied by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and all other ministries evangelical."<sup>2</sup> Baptism is not just the granting of permission to engage in the quest but also the investing of that effort with a sure and certain hope. In addition to starting a man on the way towards spirituality of life it also sustains his quest in the one, but crucial sense, that God will continue to stand upon the chosen place of their first true meeting. Being God, He

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 243

2 Ibid., p. 362

will not withdraw those promises or abandon those commitments which He makes in and through the form. Thus baptism is at once "the door and the ground of this confidence forever. . .; the great work is done in baptism."<sup>1</sup> It is not a meagre and smallminded loyalty to ecclesiastical standards but a very going over from death to Life that prompts Jeremy Taylor's uncompromising affirmation: "without sacraments there is no church, or it will be starved and die."<sup>2</sup>

At this point it is of first importance for us to remember that the forms in whose necessity Jeremy Taylor believes are not all Sacraments. A form's historically demonstrable institution by Jesus Christ is not, for him, prerequisite to a firm belief in its vitality--that is, in God's having willed to use it creatively for man's spiritual benefit. A most instructive instance is offered by the

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 239

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 320. The strength of this conviction is partially revealed in the fact that J.T., by common critical consent one of the seventeenth century's finest preachers, gave to the Sacraments a distinct priority over preaching. "Let no man advance the preaching of the word of God to the disparagement, or to occasion the neglect, of the sacraments. For though it be true that faith comes by hearing, yet it is not intended that by hearing alone faith is engendered; for the faith of the apostles came by seeing; and S. Paul's faith did not come by hearing, but by intuition and revelation; and 'hearing' in those words of S. Paul does not signify the manner of ministration, but the whole economy of the word of God, the whole office of preaching; which is done most usefully to babes and strangers by sermon and homily, but more gloriously and illustriously to men by sacraments." (Works, Vol. VIII, p. 47)

rite of confirmation, of which he is quite confident that "it comes from God and ministers in our way to God" even though he admits with equal readiness that it is of "an use and nature inferior to the two sacraments of divine, direct, and immediate institution."<sup>1</sup> Because its authority is of a different order its potential contribution to the spiritual life, if restricted, is never rendered non-existent.

Jeremy Taylor's concern for the rite of confirmation is indissolubly related to his belief in the baptism of infants. He recognizes that infant baptism without a subsequent confirmation always threatens to dispossess the Sacrament of its moral quality. For on the one hand baptism, as we have suggested, is above all a redemptive activity of God and its final efficacy is His glory, not man's. On the other hand there remains that incontrovertible sense in which the Sacrament is forever incomplete until it brings forth a human response of acceptance and self-giving--a response of which infants are manifestly incapable and which no other human beings can, in any permanent way, make on their behalf.

The inseparability of these two forms thus emerges from the fact that the one finishes what the other has so splendidly begun by nourishing the essential human response. Within that response there comes into being an assumption of personal responsibility at those deep levels where the

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1 Works, Vol. V, p. 619

spiritual life must be sought and lived. In confirmation we take the burden of that responsibility "upon our own shoulders, together with the advantage of the prayers of the bishop and all the church made then on our behalf."<sup>1</sup> But it is not quite that simple. For even in the moment of our doing this tremendous thing we know that somehow God is doing it in us, and for us, even as He did in our baptism. "In confirmation He makes us able to move ourselves," yet He and only He "is the spirit of strength and motion."<sup>2</sup> In and through the form God--in a limited but very real way the captive of His own nature--is characteristically seeking us and making us His very own.

The believing community within whose bounds the seeker's quest develops is the custodian of still other forms designed for the support and strengthening of his effort. Jeremy Taylor reminds us that the apostles, for instance, saw with great penetration of insight the necessity of believing in Jesus. They also understood that before that belief in Him could fully come alive in us "it was necessary we should understand He was a person to be relied upon, that He was infinitely credible, powerful and wise, just and holy."<sup>3</sup> These men knew, of course, that all of this, and far more, was implicit in the simplicity of the proclaimed gospel--'Jesus is Lord.' "Yet they knowing it

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1 Works, Vol. V, p. 656

2 Ibid., p. 616

3 Works, Vol. VI, p. 437

was fit we should understand this simplicity with the investiture of some circumstances, and yet knowing that it was not fit the simplicity of faith should be troubled with new matter, were pleased to draw the whole into a scheme, sufficient and intelligible, but nothing perplexed, nothing impertinent; and this the church hath called the Apostles' Creed."<sup>1</sup>

It is indeed an instructive instance for it suggests about the creed precisely what Jeremy Taylor contends, with varying degrees of intensity, to be generally true about the whole liturgical practice of the church;<sup>2</sup> namely, that it is an expression of deep human concern for the Gospel--that is, for the God who is the Gospel. Refusal to accept and use liturgy is, at its base, to embrace a petty conception of Him, and to be irresponsible about the one relationship on which all else depends. "Let any man answer me if he thinks it can well stand with that reverence we owe to the immense, the infinite, and to the eternal God, the God of wisdom, to offer Him a sacrifice which we durst not present to a prince or a prudent governor."<sup>3</sup> The answer, and the alternatives, at least to Jeremy Taylor, are sufficiently obvious: "unless religion be the most imprudent, trifling, and inconsiderable thing, and that the work of the Lord is done well enough when it is done

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1 Works, Vol. VI, p. 437

2 For an excellent summary of the general achievements and advantages of that practice, see Works, Vol. V, pp. 232-33.

3 Works, Vol. V, p. 261



negligently, . . it will concern us highly to think our prayers and religious offices are actions fit for wise men, and therefore to be done as the actions of wise men use to be, that is, deliberately, prudently, and with greatest consideration."<sup>1</sup>

In a most vital way, to use any of the Christian forms is to exercise that consideration. And it is an exercise which inevitably evokes a sure response in God. For the Holy Spirit, on whose activity the efficacy of all forms must finally depend, ordinarily does not aid the seeker by a direct and semi-magical intervention which ignores the whole structure of his life. Rather, "the aids of the Holy Ghost are only assistances to us in the use of natural and artificial means;"<sup>2</sup> He makes his redemptive way into the seeker through the structure, filling the forms which comprise that structure with the true Life which it is His prerogative to give and to take away. That is why "set forms of prayer, studied and considered of, are in a true and proper sense, and without enthusiasm, the fruits of the Spirit."<sup>3</sup> And in a broader, but intimately related, context that is also why "public forms of liturgy are. . . the great securities and basis to the religion and piety of the people."<sup>4</sup>

From all of this there can remain little doubt that

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1 Works, Vol. V, p. 263

2 Ibid., p. 264

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 304

Jeremy Taylor believes mightily in the vitality and in the consequent necessity of forms. But we must get beyond this seemingly unqualified certainty and explore another conviction which not only qualifies the belief in forms but in itself brings us measurably nearer the heart of the matter. The fact which must now concern us is that Jeremy Taylor is strongly convinced of the limited efficacy of the very forms whose centrality to the spiritual life he is always concerned to establish. If we have previously emphasized the sense in which a form is not just a form, we must now make abundantly clear the sense in which it is just that, and no more. We must now cope with his keen awareness of the measure in which every form "is a bodily and carnal part, an outside and a cabinet of religion."<sup>1</sup> A cabinet could conceivably be one of reality's locales, and therefore of high value; but the cabinet could never be the precious thing it contains.

All forms incur this limitation upon their efficacy primarily because the spiritual life in its essence is an affair between God and the soul of man.<sup>2</sup> This does not

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 255

2 In addition, there is of course the history of J.T.'s own time, the turbulent circumstances of which doubtless nourished his belief in the limited efficacy of all forms. In the year 1650, for instance, his dedication of Holy Living to Richard Vaughan, Earl of Carberry, includes the following significant observation: "concerning the present state of the Church of England, I consider that because we now want the blessings of external communion in many degrees, and the circumstances of a prosperous and unafflicted people, we are to take estimate of ourselves

(Continued on next page)

mean that God is unable or unwilling to use intervening media for the perfecting of that life; nor does it mean that such media necessarily diminish the directness which is that affair's most characteristic quality. But at the very least it does surely indicate that within that directness "none can give laws to souls but God; He only is Lord of wills and understandings;"<sup>1</sup> and therefore, that any form placed between the two who share in that immediacy of relationship "must be so wholly depending on the will of God that it must have its being and abiding only from thence."<sup>2</sup> The inevitability to be recognized and dealt with is that all forms, "unless they be directed and proceed on to those purposes which God designed them to. . . return into the family of common, secular, or sinful actions."<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, they betray the seeker and produce in him the desperate condition "in which nothing is given to God but the body, or the forms of religion; but the soul and the power of godliness is wholly wanting."<sup>4</sup>

Never, that is to say, can the seeker assume any minute

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(Footnote 2 continued)

with single judgments, and every man is to give sentence concerning the state of his own soul by the precepts and rules of our Law-giver, not by the after-decrees and usages of the church; that is, by the essential parts of religion rather than by the uncertain significations of any exterior adherencies." (Works, Vol. III, p. 2)

- 1 Works, Vol. X, p. 271
- 2 Works, Vol. IX, p. 579
- 3 Works, Vol. III, p. 21
- 4 Ibid., p. 22

degree of efficacy to inhere in the form itself. "True it is," remarks Jeremy Taylor of the Lord's Supper, "God works in us His graces by the sacrament."<sup>1</sup> And to sit at that table, taking its Host's bread and drinking His cup, is to know that perhaps the finest and mightiest of those graces is forgiven sin. But in the very moments when the seeker feels most surely the inflow of that forgiveness he must be wholly vigilant against the tragic confusion which somehow does prompt weak and erring men to praise the form rather than the God who is using the form to love them into life. The Sacrament in which the forgiveness of sin emerges most clearly and through which it becomes incontestably real is, in an utterly irrevocable way, an external action. However, even in the joy of a forgiveness which he experiences fully only after the performance of that outward thing, the seeker must cling tenaciously to the truth that "no external action can purify the soul, because its nature and operations being spiritual, it can no more be changed by a ceremony or an external solemnity, than an angel can be caressed with sweetmeats, or a man's belly can be filled with music or long orations."<sup>2</sup> Such is the paradox which forever tries and tests him.

And such are the origins of the crisis which always surrounds the seeker's approach to the forms. In his weakness he must come to them. From them he cannot force

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 255

2 Ibid., pp. 255-56

himself to stay away, having discovered that they are God's favourite trysting place with man, and that they are meant "to minister to weakness and infirmities, and by bodily expressions to invite forward, to entertain, to ferment, to endear the spirit of a man to the purposes of God."<sup>1</sup> In his need he approaches them gratefully and full of confidence. But his approach to these conveyers of the true life for which he longs must also be informed by the spirit of fear and trembling. For in addition to being more immediately apparent to him than the God who indwells them, the forms in their own right are things of great beauty and exercise on him their own strange power of attraction. Always, therefore, there is the terrifying possibility that through the very media intended for his salvation the seeker will become, in fact, an idolater.

Confronted with that possibility, the earnest Christian contender does not turn his back upon the forms and undertake to fulfil his quest without them. He does not set about to disentangle the Christian life from its God-given, structural involvement; nor does he try to pretend that this immutable relationship is a diminution of Christianity's essential spirituality. Rather, he accepts the involvement of the faith in its framework for what it is--one of the gracious and loving mysteries of the Divine will. But--and this qualification is indeed a major one, emerging as it does from a recognition of Divine priorities--a most

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1 Works, Vol. IX, p. 553

important aspect of his acceptance is a deeply honest and straightforward facing up to the implications of the fact that "when God enjoins any external rite or ceremony, the outward work is always the less principal."<sup>1</sup> This ordering of things is merely an expression of the spiritual life's most agonizing impossibility; namely, that no "ceremony can make a spiritual change, without a spiritual act of him that is to be changed."<sup>2</sup>

The seeker thus understands that "'it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness,' even the external also,"<sup>3</sup> just because God has chosen to make His own creative use of that externality. But in the same experience of perception he gets further beneath the surface and also understands that the response "which makes us gracious in His eyes is not the external, it is the love of the heart, and the real change of the mind and obedience of the spirit."<sup>4</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 255

2 Works, Vol. III, p. 261

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 256

4 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 256. That is why J.T. in his Rules and Advices to the Clergy of the Diocese of Down and Connor, is so insistent and uncompromising on this point: "In taking accounts of the good lives of yourselves or others, take your measures. . . last of all by their observation of the ordinances and exterior parts of religion." (Works, Vol. I, p. 104) Even as an Anglican Bishop, an express part of whose responsibility was to preserve respect for and observance of the 'exterior parts of religion,' J.T. was compelled inwardly to give this seemingly contradictory counsel to the priests under his jurisdiction. Not, indeed, because of any disbelief in those 'exterior parts,' but because he knew that they are not ultimate, and that there is a point in the experience of seeking man at which they must pass away, a point at which "our service to God must not be in outward works and scenes of religion, it must be something by which we become like to God; the divine prerogative must extend beyond the outward man." (Works, Vol. VIII, p. 255)



If the form does not speak to him with the utmost persuasiveness of that necessity, it can only become the apparatus implementing his downfall, the tragedy of it consisting in the fact that the whole enterprise in which he is engaged comes to a dead stop exactly at that point where it is intended by God to gain its greatest momentum.

Do not for a single instant suppose, writes Jeremy Taylor to a person recently converted from the Church of Rome, that for having changed the locale of your quest you are less essentially obligated to approach, to believe in, and to use the forms: "you are not to think that the priest's power is less, that the sacraments are not effective, that your prayers may not be repeated frequently; but you are to remember that all outward things and ceremonies, all sacraments and institutions, work their effect in the virtue of Christ by some moral instrument."<sup>1</sup> It is the prerogative of forms to say to seeking man: 'we shall do our wondrous work when, in the virtue of Christ, you become that moral instrument.'

In exacting that price they exhibit what is perhaps their noblest quality by confessing that however completely they may surround the spiritual life still they are not it, and then by pointing beyond themselves to those levels of reality where alone that life must, in the end, be lived. The forms complete their message to the seeker and so fulfil

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1 Works, Vol. VI, p. 662



the purpose of their creation when they say to him:

'Behold thy God. And behold thyself. Look to thine inner man, for it is there that God would dwell.'

All of which comes to just this: it is the highly paradoxical function of forms to bring the seeker to that elevated plane of vision where he can wholly comprehend that the religion of Jesus Christ is, in the last and best analysis, "a spiritual service. . .that is, not relative to time and place, or any material circumstances, nor integrated by corporal services."<sup>1</sup> It is the mysterious function of forms, at the most creative heights of the seeker's consciousness, finally to cancel themselves out. It is only so that they urge and in some magnificent sense empower him, along with his fellow members in the worshipping Body, to move "past the twilights of conversion and the umbrages of the world, and walk in the light of God, of His word and of His Spirit, of grace and reason, as becometh not babes, but men in Christ Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. IX, p. 516

2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 511

## Chapter Four

### THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE

"Let us see Taylor aright, and we shall perceive that his sweetness grows out of an inward severity."

--Dowden, Puritan and Anglican:  
Studies in Literature.

"Piety is not softness."

--J.T.

"There is a story told of a very religious person, whose spirit, in the extasy of devotion, was transported to the clarity of a vision; and he seemed to converse personally with the holy Jesus, feeling from such intercourse great spiritual delights and huge satisfactions. In the midst of these joys, the bell called to prayers; and he, used to the strictness and well instructed in the necessities of obedience, went to the church, and having finished his devotions, returned and found the vision in the same posture of glories and entertainment: which also said to him, 'Because thou hast left Me, thou hast found me: for if thou hadst not left me, I had presently left thee.'"<sup>1</sup>

It is inevitable that Jeremy Taylor should say of this tale, "I am sure it is a good parable."<sup>2</sup> For it points to the unqualified necessity of an embraced discipline, if the religious life is to partake of reality. And quite apart from its emergence in specific detail, that general necessity surrounds the wholeness of his thought and constitutes much of its essential, characteristic spirit. Consistently, as we shall proceed to demonstrate, he seems to be moving in the direction of an inward severity which manifests itself in nearly everything he writes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. II, p. 122

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Not least in personal correspondence. In a letter written "to a person newly converted to the church of England," this emphasis is apparent: "you will find that though the Church of England gives you much liberty from the bondage of innumerable ceremonies

The classic objection to this general emphasis is that it tends to diminish and finally to destroy that core of moral spontaneity which is the spiritual life's best protection against the tyranny incipient in every disciplinary effort, however well intended. Jeremy Taylor is not insensitive to the force with which this objection can be sustained. He feels the weight of its evidence, yet without ceasing to understand that the insight undergirding it is not the final one. With all its dangers and possible perversions, discipline remains not the grave but the cradle of freedom. "As no man will complain that his temples are restrained and his head is prisoner when it is encircled with a crown; so when the Son of God hath made us free, and hath only subjected us to the service and domination of the Spirit, we are free as princes within the circles of their diadem, and our chains are bracelets, and the law is a law of liberty. . .and Christ's yoke is like feathers to a bird, not loads, but helps to motion."<sup>1</sup> There is no shrinking away from the paradox that freedom is a form of slavery.

In part this explains, or at least illumines, Taylor's manifest willingness to lay down rules for the conduct of

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(Footnote 3 continued)

and human devices, yet in the matter of holiness you will be tied to very great service. . .and a very strict religious life. . . We give you no easy devices. . .but oblige you to that strictness which is the condition of being saved." (Works, Vol. VI, p. 663)

1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 335

the spiritual life; and to do this not solely for its great and crucial issues, but also, and with equal care, for the least significant and most commonplace of those single instances which are its constituent parts.<sup>1</sup>

There is in that willingness nothing of the naivety which supposes worth to be inherent in the rules themselves. The rules are only a kind of response to and expression of the categorical demands for obedience emerging ceaselessly from the spiritual life's innermost realms. As such, whatever authority they possess cannot be intrinsic or inescapable; yet, to take them seriously is to be in touch with almost cosmic forces. And to experience them in that context is inevitably to become more intimate with difficulty and pain; for it is their strange prerogative to introduce us to, and in the end to make us friendly with, "the severities of Christianity, and the strictnesses of a holy life,"<sup>2</sup> thus effecting our liberation from the

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1 For example, in the most ordinary, casual conversation, the seeking man must first "be sure to speak nothing that may minister to a vice, willingly and by observation; secondly, if anything be of a suspicious and dubious nature, that he decline to publish it; thirdly, that by a prudent moral care he watch over his words, that he do none of this injury and unworthiness; fourthly, that he offer up to God in his prayers all his words, and then look to it that he speak nothing unworthy to be offered; fifthly, that he often interweave discourses of religion and glorifications of God, instruction to his brother and ejaculations of his own, something or other not only to sanctify the order of his discourses, but to call him back into retirement and sober thoughts. . . ." (Works, Vol. IV, p. 280)

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 620

lie which tempts us to believe that religion can be "the work of a few hours in the whole year."<sup>1</sup>

Against such a background it is understandable that we should find in Jeremy Taylor something bordering on a preoccupation with the experience of suffering. There is, for instance, a genuinely indicative revelation of his total outlook in the fact that he says of the beatitudes: "they are states of suffering rather than states of life; for the great employment of a Christian being to bear the cross, Christ laid the pedestal so low, that the rewards were like rich mines interred in the deeps and inaccessible retirements, and did choose to build our felicities upon the torrents and violences of affliction and sorrow."<sup>2</sup>

When Jeremy Taylor thinks of Jesus Christ, he always thinks primarily, and often exclusively of "Him that was crowned with thorns and sorrows, Him that was drenched in Cedron, nailed upon the cross, that deserved all good and suffered all evil."<sup>3</sup> When he considers Christ's work he remembers that it is inclusive of forgiven sin and deliverance from law-keeping; but the focus of his concern about that work is that Christ, having relieved us of these two sources of suffering, "hath put on a third. He quits us of our burden, but not of our duty; and hath changed the former tyranny and the less perfect discipline into the

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 425

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 392; cf. his description of "the daily sufferings of a Christian," (Works, Vol. IV, pp. 441-42)

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 437



sweetness of paternal regiment."<sup>1</sup> When he examines the teaching of this Christ it speaks to him most convincingly of suffering's priority over other areas of the seeker's experience: "if we summon up the commandments of Christ, we shall find humility, mortification, self-denial, repentance, renouncing the world, mourning, taking up the cross, dying for Him, patience and poverty, to stand in the chiefest rank of Christian precepts."<sup>2</sup>

If this seems to be an excessive interest in suffering, and to undervalue other legitimate aspects of the total Christian experience, we must be willing to see it as an integral part of Jeremy Taylor's effort to place religious discipline in its proper context and to expedite the exercise of its high prerogative. It is discipline's unique function so to introduce a man to suffering that his experience of it points up its value. The obedience and courage nourished by his disciplinary efforts enable him unflinchingly to embrace the paradox that "the truth of love is hardly known but by somewhat that puts us to pain."<sup>3</sup> Indirectly, but none the less surely, his discipline is creative of the realization that "no greater contradiction can be offered to the designs of God and His holy Son, than to dissuade us from suffering,"<sup>4</sup> the realization's deeper content being that "if we be put to suffer,

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 515; cf. Works, Vol. IV, p. 444

2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 437

3 Works, Vol. III, p. 322

4 Works, Vol. II, p. 620

and do suffer, in a good cause, or in a good manner, so that in any sense our sufferings be conformable to His sufferings, or can be capable of being united to His, we shall reign together with Him."<sup>1</sup> That he has fully embraced the paradox is evidenced in the extremity of energy directed against "those temptations which seduce us into ease, and divorce us from the cross, as being opposite to our greatest hopes and most perfect desires," as well as in the contempt reserved for any perversion of spirituality by means of which a man "breaks off the yoke of obedience, and unties the bands of discipline, and preaches a cheap repentance, and presents heaven in the midst of flowers, and strews carpets softer than the Asian luxury in the way."<sup>2</sup> Such a denial of discipline's necessity is a falling in love with falsehood.

It is a denial which rests upon the false assumption that obedience is not an absolutely essential ingredient in the processes of mind and heart and will out of which the spiritually oriented life is made. For Jeremy Taylor the spirit of obedience is crucially important, sustaining, as it does, the disciplinary embrace and bringing to the whole religious enterprise that élan vital which makes it possible and accurate to speak of spirituality as a 'life.' 'Spirit of obedience' is a phrase deliberately chosen because it suggests that in its essence obedience is an inward

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 322

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 620

condition, not to be detected by the presence of any external action, although some such action is its normal manifestation. "By obedience I do not here mean the exterior execution of the work. . .but besides the doing of the thing. . .it is a sacrifice of our proper will to God, a choosing the duty because God commands it."<sup>1</sup>

Obedience involves the performance of duties, and is thus constantly bringing the disciplinary effort into being, but the performance of duties is, in itself, not obedience, which unfailingly has its origins in those deepnesses which are, collectively, the locale for man's crucial choices. Thus Jeremy Taylor is sure that mortification is "a duty of Christianity," but equally certain that there can be no law concerning the exact techniques with which the duty is to be effected. "We are not commanded to roll ourselves on thorns, as S. Benedict did; or to burn our flesh, like S. Martinian; or to tumble in snows with S. Francis; or in pools of water with S. Bernard. A man may chew aloes, or lie upon the ground, or wear sackcloths if he have a mind to it, and if he finds it good in his circumstances and to his purposes of mortification; but it may be he do it alone by the instrumentalities of fear and love."<sup>2</sup> Legalism, however subtle its emergence, however cunningly tacit its claim, is always a violence to the true spirit of obedience.

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1 Works, Vol. II, pp. 106-7

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 256

Externals simply cannot be the core of an experience which is basically an unyielding, mighty, determined clinging to God, a tenacity quite unconcerned about the consequences of its own activity. "Let us choose God, and let God choose all the rest for us; it being indifferent to us whether by poverty or shame, by a lingering or a sudden death, by the hands of a tyrant prince, or the despised hands of a base usurper or rebel we receive the crown, and do honour to God. . ."<sup>1</sup> That unconditioned readiness to live in the decision for God, whatever it may entail, is what Jeremy Taylor means by obedience. So conceived, the disciplinary enterprise takes its place in a framework at once blessedly simple and frighteningly complex: "God's command is all our rule for practice; and our obedience, united to the obedience of Jesus, is all our title to acceptance."<sup>2</sup>

On the human side this definitive decision for God precedes, informs, and sustains everything attempted in the name of discipline. And too much is involved in it for it easily to be a single event in the seeker's experience; there is some real sense in which he must be making this choice endlessly, without respite. For in its less positive aspect the choice implies the constant sacrifice of those objects toward which our emotional nature inclines us, even though such objects are the bearers of no

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 460

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 106

intrinsic evil: "we do not else give Him any thing or part of ourselves, but when we for His sake part with what we naturally desire."<sup>1</sup> Beyond that necessity, the choice must also be forever placing reason upon the altar: "our understanding must be sacrificed too, and become an ingredient of our obedience;"<sup>2</sup> we must also believe that whatsoever God commands is most fitting to be commanded, is most excellent in itself."<sup>3</sup> Still further, the choice, while it is primarily an act of the will is simultaneously a sacrifice of the will, its forward look centring upon that expanding point in time when "our wills are made spiritual."<sup>4</sup> The unending God-choice is a total thing, leaving untouched no part of a man's being. It is an abandoning of oneself to God. And it eagerly, obediently embraces discipline in order that its self-giving may hold nothing back.

So it is that we have moved into that area where faith itself is seen to impinge upon the wholeness of the disciplinary undertaking. Without question, faith has its own characteristic and somewhat impenetrable complexities, being "a conjugation of many ingredients."<sup>5</sup> There is in it an intellectual, rational element of assent to and

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 374

2 For particulars in which "obedience of understanding" consists, cf. Works, Vol. IX, p. 76 ff.

3 Works, Vol. II, p. 109

4 Ibid., p. 173

5 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 299

exploration of certain propositions. There is in it an emotive element of stimulus and response in which deep speaks to deep at those levels of communication where reason's efficacy is seriously diminished or non-existent. Jeremy Taylor is cognizant of all this and indeed dwells upon these elements at great length. He is therefore never guilty of facile oversimplification when he goes on to insist that the act of faith is most significantly volitive. However much it may demand of mind and heart, that act remains, for him, primarily an exercise of will. "If we consider upon what stock faith itself is instrumental and operative of salvation, we shall find it is in itself acceptable, because it is a duty, and commanded; and therefore it is an act of obedience, a work of the gospel. . ."<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, to have faith is not simply to think one's way toward truth and/or to feel one's way toward truth, but to will that the truth toward which thought and feeling point shall find in one's own life the medium for its own self-evident demonstration. Unless a major violence inhibits its growth, true faith increasingly becomes "a sincere cleaving to, and closing with the terms of the gospel in every instance, in every particular."<sup>2</sup> Faith, then, makes a telling and most authoritative demand upon the seeker's capacity to obey. Indeed, within the context of this experience he grasps, with an amazing comprehensiveness,

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 298

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 299

the truth that "obedience is the same thing with faith and that all Christian graces are parts of its bulk and constitution."<sup>1</sup>

Such a persuasion invariably tends to erase the age-long distinction between 'faith' and 'works'. While aware of this distinction Jeremy Taylor can never be said really to accept its validity. He will grant their separate identity "in the natural or philosophical sense. . .yet in the sense of a Christian, and the signification of duty, they are the same. . ."<sup>2</sup> And it is of first import to emphasize that in questioning the validity of the distinction almost to the point of denial, Jeremy Taylor does not cease to feel the unmeasured impress of God's great redemptive act: "it is the cross of Christ that procures me grace; it is the spirit of Christ that gives me grace; it is the mercy and free gift of Christ that brings me unto glory."<sup>3</sup> But even this givenness of it all does not extract from faith the vital element of human responsibility; nor does it remove faith from the realm of discipline. "For when God made a covenant of faith He made also the νόμος πίστεως, 'the law of faith;'. . .He did not admit us to. . .an incurious walking in a state of disobedience. . . When He gives us better promises, He intends we should pay Him a better obedience. . .When He enables us to do what He commands us, He commands us to do all that we can."<sup>4</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 299

2 Ibid., p. 300

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 294

4 Ibid., pp. 294-95



The new relationship between God and man which it was Christ's work to establish thus never weakens but always strengthens the disciplinary embrace. For the faith which is man's response to that work, and which is creative of his opportunity to experience its redemptive consequence, is itself a discipline, presenting as its best credential the evidence of a life in which the demand for obedience is always taken seriously, even though it may not always be fully satisfied. "That only is faith that makes us to love God, to do His will, to suffer His impositions, to trust His promises, to see through a cloud, to overcome the world, to resist the devil, to stand in the day of trial."<sup>1</sup> Faith, whatever else it may be, is nothing if not work. Apart from the persistently unrelaxing tension of sacrificial human activity--that is, apart from discipline--it can have no being. This fact places the act of faith, and ultimately the whole spiritual life, in an environment of responsibility which is nothing less than agonizing in its intensity. "Let no man. . .call for God's fidelity without his own faithfulness, nor snatch at a promise without performing the condition; nor think faith to be a hand to apprehend Christ, and to do nothing else; for that will but deceive us, and turn religion into words, and holiness into hypocrisy, and the promises of God into a snare, and the truth of God into a lie."<sup>2</sup> To escape

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 299

2 Ibid., pp. 294-95

this tragedy of finding in the apprehension of faith's final object a release from the immediacy of faith's obligations involves the hearty and passionate acceptance not alone of discipline's desirability but also its real, its very nearly unlimited necessity.

From all that has been suggested about the prominence of suffering, obedience, and the disciplinary quality of the choice informing the act of faith, it should have become clear that in the ongoing processes which bring mortal life more and more into the realm of spirit the definitively motivating force is that of will. This priority derives its continuance, if not its origin, from a careful reading of human experience<sup>1</sup> which convinced Jeremy Taylor that "when all the other faculties are weakest, the will is strongest, and does not at all depend upon the body. Indeed it often follows the inclination and affections of the body, but it can choose against them, and it can work without them."<sup>2</sup> It is this, its relative dependability, that commends the will to his pragmatic mind, and supports the claim made for its priority. Fulfilling

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1 That such a conviction was more the result of his reading of experience than of considered philosophical judgment can, of course, never be proved. Yet it is the overwhelming impression left on one after careful perusal of passages in his writings relating directly or indirectly to this matter. As a typical example the reader is referred to his three sermons on "The Flesh and The Spirit," Works, Vol. IV, p. 117 ff., or to Discourse II in Great Exemplar, "Of the Virtue of Obedience," Works, Vol. II, p. 106 ff.

2 Works, Vol. VII, pp. 280-81

the obligations implicit in the general acceptance of discipline's necessity must be understood primarily as an act of volition, "for all the duty of the inner man consists in the actions of the will, and there they are seated, and to it all the inferior faculties obey in those things which are direct emanations and effects of will."<sup>1</sup> To rely largely upon faculties other than the will is a tacit evasion of man's primal obligations and in the end can only render his response to them "full of noise and empty of profit;" alone in a primary reliance upon will can that essential response be made "deep and smooth, material and devout."<sup>2</sup>

While maintaining that such is the degree of high import assigned by Jeremy Taylor to the activity of will we must be careful to anticipate and deal with a possible misunderstanding. His insistence upon the primacy of will is by no means an exclusive one which, by its exclusiveness, precludes the possibility of contributions from the other elemental energies which men possess. He knows that mind, heart, and will are intermingled with, and in some real sense inseparable from, each other.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 141

2 Works, Vol. III, p. 163

3 Perhaps this partially explains what at times is a distressingly unprecise use of the words "mind," "heart," "will," and "spirit." At various places in his writings all four of these words mean virtually the same thing. This necessitates extreme care in the consideration of any particular passage. It is apparent that, for him, the distinctions did exist but he did not often feel that they could be adequately made, in every context, with the same words.

At no point does he become enmeshed in the artificiality which too easily divides human actions and calls them simply volitive, rational, or emotive, as if it were possible for any activity of a human being to have such singularly uncomplicated origins. His emphasis upon the will's role, however definite, does not lead him to suppose that reason is powerless to make its own unique impress for good; or even that emotion, deceptive and unreliable though it be, can not advance the causes of spirituality.

Moreover, that emphasis does not rest upon the naive assumption that will is somehow exempt from the crippling necessity which is our sin. Indeed, sin maintains its tenacious grasp upon the whole of man's being and it is quite impossible, within such totality, for any part of that being to escape its influence. The will, therefore, if it is potentially the greatest aid to spirituality, can also be its very great deterrent. "The will is the only fountain and proper principle of sin, insomuch as the fact is no sin. . .but the willing is a sin, though no act follows."<sup>1</sup> Dependence upon the will, even though it is undeniably necessary, can never be total and complete. Jeremy Taylor perceives this inevitable restriction upon will's authority and does not hesitate to interpret it as one of its inadequacies. Unconsciously, perhaps, but no

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 381

less actually, this awareness increases his readiness to consult reason, to respect it, and in some measure to believe it quite as reliable, if not as powerful, as the will.<sup>1</sup>

The rational faculty finds its proper function in furnishing for the will that sense of direction without which will's power is unerringly misspent; and in so doing, reason makes its distinctive contribution to the upbuilding of discipline. It makes possible the channelling and concentration of power which bring to the disciplinary quest its characteristic sense of movement. Being, as it is, "the eye of the soul in all things, natural, moral, and religious,"<sup>2</sup> reason illumines those vital areas upon which the will's power can be most efficaciously applied.<sup>3</sup> It

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1 J.T.'s interest in reason as a source of spirituality has sometimes resulted in his being labelled as one of the Cambridge Platonists. Whether or not this classification of his thought is accurate and to what extent it could survive a close scrutiny of his writings constitutes the subject matter of a separate, worthwhile study.

2 Works, Vol. IX, p. 75

3 This is one of the important bulwarks in J.T.'s defence against the charge that the devotional life is usually rooted in ignorance. Although he himself would grant that this had sometimes been the fact, especially in the history of Roman Catholic piety, he is unyielding in his belief that it is in no sense an intrinsically necessary relationship. "Though you have been often told and have heard that ignorance is the mother of devotion, you will find that the proposition is unnatural, and against common sense and experience; because it is impossible to desire that of which we know nothing, unless the desire itself be fantastical and illusive: it is necessary that in the same proportion in which we understand any good thing, in the same we shall also desire it. . . The more you know them the more reason you have to love them. . . It is monstrous to think that devotion, that is, passionate desires of religious things, and the earnest prosecutions of them, should be produced by any thing of ignorance. . . ." (Works, Vol. VI, pp. 661-62)



knows where discipline wants to go; always somewhat dimly, but at times with amazingly increased clarity, it sees through the clouds to the place where will, at last, can complete its mission and find its rest.

Reason is enabled to perform this high function in considerable measure because its activity is not simply an unconcerned exercise of intellect. Far more than mere 'reasoning,' so-called, is here involved; the understanding of which reason is creative "is something beside the intellectual power of the soul; it is the spirit; that is, it is celestial in its application, as it is spiritual in its nature."<sup>1</sup> This added dimension means that reason, when faithful to its own nature, seeks not some vague, impersonal generalization of truth, but specifically religious truth; truth, that is, which will make its own claims upon the life of him who reasons. It is in this higher context that the rational faculty directs and guides the gathering momentum of those vital energies generated in the will's embrace of discipline. It is this framework which surrounds Jeremy Taylor's affirmation that "we enter by reason. . .into the greatest mysteriousnesses of our religion and the deepest articles of faith. . . Whosoever believes wisely and not by chance, enters into his faith by the hand of reason."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 130

2 Works, Vol. IX, p. 61. It is certainly interesting, and perhaps genuinely relevant in this connection that in the preface to Great Exemplar, J.T. observes and deplores the fact that most devotional books are written for persons who "can do nothing but believe and love, not for them that can consider and love." This circumstance  
(Continued on next page)

That is to say, reason is not a guide in the sense that it points out the places of special interest, in order that they may be considered, admired, and left behind. It is a guide in the far more crucial sense of taking the seeker to that place where he must decide and choose and make commitments. And in the further sense that it continues, through all the vicissitudes of his experience, repeatedly to redirect the seeker to that path of wisdom and insight on which sacred commitments are not easily abandoned. To accept this guidance from reason's hand is to become intimate with what Jeremy Taylor would call one of the faith's many severities. In the degree of its completeness, the acceptance is an experience of "the obedience founded in the understanding."<sup>1</sup> Such rational obedience, "when all the incentives of affection and exterior determinations of our piety shall cease, and perhaps all external offices, and the 'daily sacrifice,' and piety itself, shall fail from the face of the land. . . is the only lasting strength left us to make retreat to, and to secure our conditions."<sup>2</sup>

In these certainties stemming out from reason's high nature and its exalted task, Jeremy Taylor finds no suggestion of its infallibility. As we have previously

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(Footnote 2 continued)

stance he interprets as a failure to comprehend rationality's proper role. "Since the understanding is not an idle faculty in a spiritual life, but hugely operative to all excellent and reasonable choices, it were very fit that this faculty were also entertained by such discourses which God intended as instruments of hallowing it." (Works, Vol. II, p. 35)

1 Works, Vol. II, p. 111

2 Ibid.,



observed in the case of man's volitive capacity, here again his understanding of sin's totality does not permit him to suppose that there can be any exemptions from its dark influence. Nothing remains untouched, untainted. Necessarily, therefore, in choosing to follow the sense of direction which reason gives there is the constantly emerging possibility of deception: "reason may argue very well, and yet conclude falsely; it may conclude well in logic, and yet infer a false proposition in theology."<sup>1</sup> Added to this is another limitation upon reason's reliability rising out of the fact that the realities which it would have us see are often, by their very nature, beyond its own field of vision. "In many things she (reason) knows nothing but the face of the article: the mysteries of faith are often like Cherubim's heads placed over the propitiatory, where you may see a clear and a bright face and golden wings, but there is no body to be handled; there is light and splendour upon the brow but you may not grasp it. . . that is, the whole knowledge which we can have here is dark and obscure. . . What we do see is the least part of that which does not appear."<sup>2</sup> The light which reason sheds is sometimes only a feeble glow in the thickening darkness.

If will to some extent, and reason to an even greater one, both have their peculiar inadequacies as aids to spirituality, it is also true that emotion has limitations

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 106

2 Works, Vol. IX, p. 64

still more severe, and that feeling, as such, is almost totally bereft of power to help a man in his quest for life and truth.<sup>1</sup> Repeatedly, he is concerned to remind us that there is no necessary, or even probable, relationship between what a man feels, be it strong or weak, and his proximity to truth. A typical and instructive instance is found in his counsel to those who reflect on the meaning of their participation in the Lord's Supper: "let no man judge of himself, or of the blessing and efficacy of the sacrament itself. . .by any sensible relish, by the gust and deliciousness which he sometimes perceives, and at other times does not perceive."<sup>2</sup> He does not deny that such emotional reactions can be a legitimate part of our religious experience. But when they do manifest themselves

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1 That J.T. should make and maintain this assertion is indeed an enigmatic circumstance. For in a careful and sensitive approach to his finest writing one can hardly escape the strong impression that J.T., the sceptical questioner of feeling, when at his best is in fact feeling his way toward truth; trusting, sometimes almost implicitly, the testimony and evidence of his emotions. However rational that evidence may later show itself to be, one cannot easily believe that he accepts it, in the first instance, because of its rational character. At the end of his biography of J.T., Reginald Heber observes that "whether he exhorts or instructs his brethren, or offers up his supplications in their behalf to the common Father of all, his conceptions and his expressions belong to the loftiest and most sacred description of poetry." (Works, Vol. I, p. ccxlix). This is one of those paradoxes of personality, quite outside the province of research, on the meaning of which we can only speculate. This writer's personal opinion is that J.T. was a poet whether he believed in being one or not, that there was some real sense in which he could not be otherwise, and that his being so was a great source of wisdom in interpreting the spiritual life.

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 49

it is often because God graciously ministers not only to our sin, but also to our immaturity: "in the beginning of religion most frequently, and at some other times irregularly, God. . .encourages our duty with little overflowings of spiritual joy, and sensible pleasure, and delicacies in prayer, so as we seem to feel some little beam of heaven, and great refreshments from the Spirit of consolation."<sup>1</sup>

If the seeker's religious effort proves, on occasion, to be emotionally rewarding, that fact should not be suppressed, but should be looked upon as wholly incidental: "these are fine accidents. . .and sometimes are the effects of natural and accidental dispositions, and sometimes are illusions."<sup>2</sup> Since these "overflowings of sensible devotion"<sup>3</sup> indicate little or nothing, either by their presence or absence, it is an uncompromising distortion deliberately to seek them and thus become involved in "a running after Him (Christ), not for the miracles but for the loaves; not for the wonderful things of God, and the desires of pleasing Him, but for the pleasures of pleasing ourselves."<sup>4</sup>

Such an immersion in feeling is one of the subtlest, and most perilous forms of self-deception. In order to deny it the possibility of growth in his own soul, a man must train himself to ignore and disregard and finally to master what he 'feels' in the prosecution of his quest,

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 185

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 49

3 Works, Vol. II, p. 136

4 Works, Vol. III, p. 185

clinging all the time to that penetration of insight through which he has come to understand that "as we must not judge our devotion to be barren or unfruitful when we want the overflowings of joy running over, so neither must we cease for want of them; if our spirits can serve God choosingly and greedily, out of pure conscience of our duty, it is better in itself, and more safe to us."<sup>1</sup>

Such is the long and tortuous path along which Jeremy Taylor moves quite relentlessly until it brings him to the belief that genuinely, if not unrestricted, ascetic effort is an integral part of the spiritual life. And while it may be true that this persuasion is informed more by his meticulously honest examination of human experience than by strictly theological presuppositions, still it must be emphasized that his espousal of ascetic disciplines is importantly rooted in the certainty that asceticism and the will of God are deeply affined. "To leave all our own desires, and to take up objects of God's propounding contrary to our own, and desires against our nature, this is that which God designed as a sacrifice of ourselves to Him; and therefore God hath made many of His laws to be prohibitions in the matter of natural pleasure, and restraints of our sensitive appetite."<sup>2</sup>

This perception of what he considers to be an extreme intimacy of relationship between asceticism and the Divine

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 185

2 Works, Vol. II, pp. 101-2

will ministers to the intense distrust with which he regards any refusal to take ascetic counsel seriously. A man who teaches or practises "a religion that satisfies all our natural desires in the days of desires and passions" and only surrenders them to God "when his appetites are gone and his desires cease, this man hath overthrown the very being of virtues, and the essential constitution of religion."<sup>1</sup> By his denial of this key necessity, such a man gnaws away at the very foundations of spirituality; that man mocks the whole magnificent concept which sees human lives fulfilling their destiny in the uninhibited service of God by turning away deliberately from the one kind of activity which alone is service. "There is no other way of serving God, we have nothing else to present unto Him; we do not else give Him any thing or part of ourselves but when we for His sake part with what we naturally desire."<sup>2</sup> Always, at the centre of true religion, there is this painful yielding, this severe enquiry "concerning our passions, whether they be mortified and quiet. . .and under command,"<sup>3</sup> this steady disinclination, when confronted with the clamant demands of heart, "to be indulgent to its fondnesses and peevish

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 374

2 Ibid.

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 504

appetites."<sup>1</sup>

Manifestly, this approach to the spiritual life, if it is to be redeemed from insincerity and held above the level of mere verbiage, must have something decidedly relevant to say concerning the human body. And it may be set down as a mark both of Jeremy Taylor's spiritual acumen and intellectual consistency that he recognizes and addresses himself to this need. "When God hath made the body an apt minister to the soul, and hath given. . . knees to serve in prayer, and hands to serve our needs, then the soul alone is not to work. . . The body must serve the needs of the spirit, that what the one desires the other may effect, and the conceptions of the soul may be the productions of the body."<sup>2</sup>

However convenient it may be for the purposes of theoretical analysis, Taylor sees clearly enough that in actual fact the distinction between 'body' and 'spirit'

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 430. The confidence of mind inspiring such statements as these did not blind J.T. to the unquestionably limited efficacy of ascetic effort. He knew that asceticism is never a spiritual panacea. It is interesting, for instance, that although he greatly admires and praises celibacy, he also is fully aware of the fact that "some married persons even in their marriage do better please God, than some virgins in their state of virginity: they by giving great example of conjugal affection, by preserving their faith unbroken, by educating children in the fear of God, by patience and contentedness, and holy thoughts, and the exercise of virtues proper to that state, do not only please God, but do in a higher degree than those virgins whose piety is not answerable to their great opportunities and advantages." (Works, Vol. III, p. 57)

2 Works, Vol. IV, pp. 147-8



tends to be artificial. That there is genuine difference between the two he readily grants, but that anything bordering on their separation can occur is, for him, beyond the realm of possibility. Thus, 'spiritual' activity, whatever it may be, has its inevitably physical expression through the body to which its bond is an organic one.

"For in virtues there is a body and a soul, and all transient actions. . . have something of materiality in them which must be ministered to by the body. . . As the actions of discerning sensitive objects are direct products of the soul, but yet have for every one of the faculties a proper organ in the body, so have the virtues of a Christian; they are acts and habits of a sanctified soul, but to some the hand does co-operate, to some the eyes, and to some all the body."<sup>1</sup> Within this unity, "it is the soul and the spirit which is the principal agent;"<sup>2</sup> that is, body realizes its destiny in serving spirit, and it is characteristic of that subservience that it never weakens the bond by which the two are held together.

This inseparability is important precisely because it is creative of "an integral, entire, or a whole worship and religion."<sup>3</sup> in which spirituality is not frigidly indifferent to or contumaciously scornful of the body. Rather, it is unashamedly cognizant of the body's real ~~ex~~istence and finds in that recognition an ever expanding

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1 Works, Vol. IX, p. 520

2 Ibid.

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 145



source of opportunity for its own emergence in the life, that is, in the actions, of men. "This spirituality does not exclude the ministry and service of the body: for the worship of the body may also be spiritual: to worship God with our bodies is λογικῇ λατρεία, a 'reasonable', and therefore 'a spiritual worship.' Thus when the eyes are lift up in prayer, when the bowels yearn with pity, when the hands are extended to fill the poor man's basket, the body serves the spirit, and the spirit serves God, and all is a spiritual religion."<sup>1</sup> The body cannot be merely incidental to the total religious effort, being the medium in which the spiritual life's vast, intangible energies must incarnate themselves or, failing that, wither away into nothingness and unreality.

Jeremy Taylor is not easily convinced that there can be any such thing as charity in a human heart unless and until there also be a pair of hands in which charity quite literally takes on flesh and does its proper work. And it is essential to remember that his reluctance to be so convinced springs not from an ethical concern for a demonstration of the gospel's relevance but rather from the prior and more penetrating belief that flesh, in accord with the design of God, is irretrievably enmeshed in the activity of spirit. That is why he feels no compulsion to qualify and render less severe his considered judgment

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1 Works, Vol. IX, p. 519

that a man who "serves God with the soul without the body, when both be conjoined, 'doth the work of the Lord deceitfully.'"<sup>1</sup> To impugn the validity of that condemnation is simply a failure to grasp one of the certainties lying at the very heart of things.

Against the background of this presupposition it becomes apparent that the general attempt to discipline the body can be made in an atmosphere of affirmation. The ascetic effort, however severe and however evocative of self-denials, can never be adequately known or profitably undertaken so long as it is conceived as a series of negations. Its content goes beyond and beneath negation to the point at which the flesh is not simply suppressed and renounced,<sup>2</sup> but also, on the positive side, "entirely possessed with religion, and fortified with prudence."<sup>3</sup> Its underlying motif is the establishment of body in a

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 147

2 The sense in which the body must be suppressed and renounced is considered further towards the end of this chapter under the discussion of contrition.

3 Works, Vol. III, p. 112. This phrase, so direct and unpretentious, comes from one of J.T.'s prayers. It is worth noting that his prayers, having in them fewer nuances of thought than his discourses, are very frequently the most helpful parts of his writing. In what seems to be an uncommonly large measure, they illuminate his thought. This is an evidence of the care and of the pressing sense of responsibility with which he composed them. It is especially true of the prayers appearing at the end of chapters in Holy Living, Holy Dying, and Great Exemplar.

relationship of active contribution to the designs of spirit. "If we do some violence to the flesh. . .we shall make our flesh useful, and the spirit strong; the flesh and its weakness shall no more be an objection, but shall comply, and co-operate, and serve all the necessities of the spirit."<sup>1</sup>

The presence of this insight, which is always discovering new possibilities of affirmation, even within the framework of denial, can be traced in another aspect of the disciplinary embrace; namely, the seeker's relationship to that 'world' from which he cannot escape and in which, therefore, his struggle toward obedience must be carried forward. That relationship is rendered exceedingly problematic by reason of what is, for Jeremy Taylor, the obvious infiltration of sin with its inevitable consequence of distortion and pain. The world "was given to serve the needs of our nature, and instead of doing it, it creates strange appetites and nourishes thirsts and fevers; it brings care, and debauches our nature, and brings shame and death as the reward of all our cares."<sup>2</sup> Thus diseased and perverted, the world is quite incapable of serving the purpose for which it was created.

Still worse, it is not simply a kind of no-man's-land on which the battles of the spiritual life are fought out to their tragic end. It cannot claim neutrality, for the

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 142

2 Ibid., p. 140

world has itself taken sides; in some real sense it has become one of the participants, helplessly perhaps, but none the less decisively, contributing to the collapse of the seeker's campaign. And this role is not blatantly played, for the world is no common antagonist; "it is a cozenage all the way; the head of it is a rainbow, and the face of it is flattery; its words are charms, and all its stories are false; its body is a shadow and its hands do knit spiders webs."<sup>1</sup> It is patent, at least in retrospect, that they who "have great intrigues of the world, have a yoke upon their necks."<sup>2</sup>

Yet it is important to emphasize the fact that Jeremy Taylor does not deduce from all of this the necessity, or even the desirability, of a withdrawal from the world. For him, the Christian's involvement in his larger environment must not end in detachment but rather be sustained through organized, disciplined renunciation. Detachment is an act of cowardice which ingloriously concedes the enemy's victory. Renunciation is an act of courage which finds in the very existence of opposing forces the raw material of spirituality, and which never permits the Christian to seek after isolation from the very circumstance which invests his struggle not only with bare purpose,

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 140

2 Works, Vol. III, p. 300

but also with genuine dignity. "Happy"<sup>1</sup> are those persons who use the world, and abuse it not; who possess a part of it, and love it for no other ends but for necessities of nature, and conveniences of person, and discharge of all their duty and the offices of religion, and charity to Christ and all Christ's members."<sup>2</sup> Always there is this positive, almost aggressive sense in which the Christian is forever meeting the world head-on, coming to grips with it, denying its alleged superiority over the forces of spirit, and finally eking out, even from this citadel of opposition, a new and unexpectedly creative realization of his own highest intentions.

In the course of this painful but rewarding process the world steadily loses its old quality of fascination; Christian man begins to see it as it truly is and knows with deepening inwardness that "all things of this world are flat and empty, and unsatisfying vanities, as unpleasant as the lees of vinegar to a tongue filled with the spirit of high Italic wines."<sup>3</sup> No longer can the world satisfy him; for his growing mastery of it gives birth to a new and better awareness which makes him "highly sensible

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- 1 In the 17th century the word 'happiness' still connoted blessedness, beatitude, the deep, abiding satisfaction arising from the purest affections. Passages such as this one are quite irrelevant if we give to the word no more than the much shallower, and far less noble meaning which it has generally come to have in our own time.
- 2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 558
- 3 Works, Vol. II, p. 128

and apprehensive of the interior beauties of God and of religion."<sup>1</sup> Another environment, for the most part previously unknown except in desire, is opening up before him and he is finding in it his own appointed place. Having heard, as it were, another drummer, he no longer keeps step with the music of what his experience has for so long tempted him to believe was the world most real of all. In a way and to an extent of which he had always been incredulous, the growing Christian experiences his release from and his independence of, the world's false standards.<sup>2</sup>

"Such is the excellency of spiritual things, when they have once filled the corners of our hearts."<sup>3</sup>

Its unquestionably real character notwithstanding, this victory over the world remains distressingly incomplete on this side of death and is therefore never destructive of discipline's necessity. Its ultimate certainty places Christian man's relationship to the world outside the reach of any final pessimism; because, however, it is always in the process of becoming, there is an immediate sense in which the victory is always uncertain. The seeking Christian must be striving, without respite, to win it and his relationship to the world can, in consequence,

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 128

2 A typical instance is J.T.'s characteristic insistence on the true blessedness of poverty, not as a kind of second best to the attainment of worldly wealth, but as a condition in itself of vast, abiding wealth. See Works, Vol. III, p. 300, also p. 96 ff.

3 Works, Vol. II, p. 128



never be conceived apart from the reality of struggle.

"For this is thy victory, for ever to contend; and although God will leave a remnant of Canaanites in the land to be thy daily exercise, and endearment of care and devotion; yet you must not let them alone, or entertain a treaty of peace with them."<sup>1</sup> The struggle is unending and as such must be understood not as a recurring incident of the spiritual life but as one of its immutable qualities. This lifts the relationship of seeking man to his world above the level where complacency is possible; for, "this is not to strive, when we only do perform those offices of religion which custom or the laws of a church enjoin us to: nor this, when our religion is cheap and easy, . . . when we call the not committing of deformed and scandalous sins a pious life; this is far from striving."<sup>2</sup> To struggle in the way that enables us to participate in religious reality "we need to stand perpetually upon our guards in continual observation,"<sup>3</sup> never looking even for so much as temporary release from what is, in the very substance of things, "a constant and universal, mortal fight."<sup>4</sup> For Jeremy Taylor, any religion which does not persistently return a man to this point of conflict is a wretched deceit. For at any less crucial point in his experience, Christian man is only dealing with the shadow of his most momentous problem;

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 388

2 Works, Vol. I, p. 120

3 Works, Vol. II, p. 188

4 Works, Vol. VII, p. 384



namely, his sin.

The struggle, that is to say, is waged not solely, or even primarily against his 'world;' that is, against those antagonistic forces lying outside himself--forces which are themselves in the grip of sin. Always with equal and usually in a greater measure it is waged against himself. Ceaselessly weaving itself through all of the spiritual life's blessed felicities is the stern reality of sin--reborn, ever emergent, unconquered, inescapably and undeniably personal.<sup>1</sup> And so it is that the struggle within which the spiritual life comes into being must in some abiding sense assume and retain the character of a civil war. We must expend our best energies "in contestation against our lusts and passions; so long denying and contradicting our own wills, till we will and choose to do things against our wills."<sup>2</sup>

"Endeavour to do what can never be done" is Taylor's summary counsel to the Christian contender; "that is, to cure all thy infirmities."<sup>3</sup> Unreservedly and through all of time to be engaged in the pursuit of the impossible--such is the core of his responsibility. He can relax his effort only at his own peril, for the very sins to whose destruction he is highly committed have a strangely perverse

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1 These aspects of the seeker's experience of his own sin are more fully considered in Chapter II.

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 188

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 388

power to "abide even after. . .their main body is broken, and therefore cannot at all be cured by those light velitations and picqueerings of single actions of hostility."<sup>1</sup> Sin is critical, which means that it creates and recreates crises in a most personal and awful measure. Faced with that, it is decidedly not enough for the serious Christian intermittently to attack his sin, first here, then there, and later on at some other point where the pain of its impress can no longer be denied. That cannot suffice, for his is "a lasting war"<sup>2</sup> in which only the well-trained and highly disciplined contestants can survive with spiritual integrity still intact and the last, best hope still undestroyed.

All of which, for Jeremy Taylor, points to one thing--the centrality of repentance. For it is the thoroughness of his repentance that determines whether or not a man's participation in the struggle has any final significance. Having suggested something of the manner in which a concern for discipline is the informing spirit for the varied problems of faith and works, the interweaving of reason and emotion and will, obedience, the ascetic effort, and the seeker's relationship to his larger environment, we must now engage in a considerably more extensive examination of the principal complexities of thought and action constitutive of repentance. For it is demonstrable that

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1 Works, Vol. VII, pp. 384-5

2 Ibid., p. 384

repentance is the consummate discipline and it is not an excess to maintain, of course with some reservations, that the relationship between repentance and the spiritual life is very nearly one of exact identity. Within the magnificently comprehensive meaning which Taylor attaches to the experience it is for most practical purposes true that to repent is to live the spiritual life.

It could hardly be otherwise with an experience in which so much of crucial import transpires: "it kills the lust of the eyes, and mortifies the pride of life; it crucifies the desires of the flesh, and brings the understanding to the obedience of Jesus: the fear of it bids war against the sin, and the sorrow breaks the heart of it: the hope that is mingled with contrition enkindles our desires to return; and the love that is in it procures our pardon, and the confidence of that pardon doth increase our love, and that love is obedience, and that obedience is sanctification, and that sanctification supposes the man to be justified before; and he that is justified must be justified still, and thus repentance is a holy life."<sup>1</sup> Such is its limitlessness, such its glory.

Along with faith "nothing else was preached by the apostles, nothing was enjoined as the duty of man, nothing else did build up the body of Christian religion; so that as faith contains all that knowledge which is necessary to

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 478; also see Works, Vol. IV, p. 382

salvation, so repentance comprehends in it all the whole practice and working duty of a returning Christian."<sup>1</sup>

So expansive is his conception of its content that he gets beyond this point and stands on still a broader base where he can no longer exclude, or even distinguish from repentance, the act of faith itself: "repentance, which includes the faith of a Christian, is but another word to express the same grace, or mercies of the evangelical covenant."<sup>2</sup> . . . For faith and repentance are but the same covenant; and so long as the just does live by faith in the Son of God, so long he lives by repentance; for by that faith in Him our sins are pardoned, that is, by becoming His disciples we enter into the covenant of repentance."<sup>3</sup> It is almost boundless. Not only in content, but also in duration.

"If by repentance we mean nothing but sorrow then it hath its season, and does not bind always to all times. But if by repentance we understand a change of life, to which sorrow is only instrumental and preparatory, then it is our duty always to repent."<sup>4</sup> With unweakening tenacity Taylor holds to the latter alternative: repentance is nothing less than "an utter extirpation of all. . . impiety, . . . an address to, and a final passing through, all the parts of holy living."<sup>5</sup> Because it is all of that, "our repentance

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 394  
 2 Works, Vol. VII, p. 423  
 3 Ibid., pp. 420-21  
 4 Works, Vol. IX, p. 681  
 5 Works, Vol. IV, p. 396

for sin is never to be at an end till faith itself shall be no more."<sup>1</sup>

It is vital that we should perceive in these statements far more than an expansive, if not very weighty, grandiloquence.<sup>2</sup> They are not emptily oratorical, but deeply indicative of what Taylor feels to be the absolute cruciality of sin. His preoccupation--indeed, what might very nearly be called his obsession--with the experience of repentance can never make substantial sense unless our conscious awareness is always being pierced and penetrated by the insight which establishes repentance as man's best way of demonstrating that he is not lighthearted and

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- 1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 420. It is to the passionate consistency with which J.T. thinks of 'repentance' and 'the Christian life' as very nearly synonymous terms that we must look for an explanation of the contempt which he manifested for all efforts--Roman Catholic, Puritan, and even those of some fellow Anglicans--to make a case for the validity of death-bed repentances. There are indications that his position on this question was somewhat less extreme in the closing years of his life. But essentially, 'death-bed repentance' was always, for him, an odious concept, being not simply an irreconcilable contradiction of terms (a condition not properly an object of contempt), but also a wretched violence to the very nature of the spiritual life's most decisive act. (See, especially, his sermon on "The Invalidity of a Late or Death-Bed Repentance", Works, Vol. IV, p. 381 ff.)
  - 2 The temptation to suspect that they are largely that is greatly increased by what seems, at least to this writer, to be the undeniably turgid character of Taylor's literary style. Edmund Gosse, who has made the best study of J.T. as a man of letters, vigorously protests that this is a false evaluation! (Gosse, E., Jeremy Taylor, especially Chapter VII.)

unconcerned about his sin. Repentance, at its base, is a grim refusal to pretend that rebellion against God, however limited its extent, is anything less than major catastrophe.

With a great intensity of power a man may loathe everything in himself which makes the rebellion possible; and it is precisely that hatred by which repentance is accurately identified. "Every single act of sin must be cut off by a moral revocation, or a contrary act; by which I mean, an express hatred and detestation of it."<sup>1</sup> Ultimately a truly penitent man will probably engage in certain characteristic activities--contrition, confession, satisfaction--but these "and some other particulars. . .are not parts, but actions, fruits, and significations of repentance."<sup>2</sup> The thing itself is not an action but a state and condition of the mind and heart and will.

It is a moral evaluation which enables the seeker gratefully to look upon and unflinchingly to embrace the painful truth that "a man ought never to be at peace with sin."<sup>3</sup> Repentance is a full, inward certainty that life takes on meaning and purpose only in the measure of a man's dedicated resistance to the sin which would destroy it. It is the knowledge that a man "undervalues his sin. . . who at any time fears he shall do too much, or make his pardon too secure, and therefore sets him down and says, "Now I have repented."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the true penitent recognizes the struggle in which he is involved as being itself

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 143

2 Ibid., p. 73

3 Ibid., p. 420

4 Ibid., p. 421



integral to religious reality. He therefore plunges into that struggle not with some kind of Stoic resignation<sup>1</sup> but with a brave expectancy, a strong and quiet eagerness to participate in a concerted attack upon the one force which always threatens to divest his life of all its remaining hope. The true penitent is not easily deceived, for he knows his arch-enemy, he respects his power and subtlety, and is therefore eternally vigilant against the perils of a lapse into overconfidence.

He must be. For his struggle has at least a double aspect arising from the fact that he is a baptized participant. In baptism the whole state of his life was changed "from the power of the devil and his entire possession, from the state of sin and death, from the body of corruption to the life of grace, to the possession of Jesus, to the

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1 This is not a suggestion that Stoic influence is unimportant in J.T.'s understanding of these and other closely related issues. Indeed, it seems reasonably clear that his general approach to the spiritual life has certain affinities with Stoic teaching. That the problem exists is indicated by such passages as the following in which the Stoic impress seems to be nearly as strong as the Christian: "We are in the world like men playing at tables; the chance is not in our power, but to play it is; and when it is fallen we must manage it as we can; and let nothing trouble us but when we do a base action, or speak like a fool, or think wickedly: these things God hath put into our powers; but concerning those things which are wholly in the choice of another, they cannot fall under our deliberation, and therefore neither are they fit for our passions." (Works, Vol. III, p. 87)



kingdom of the gospel."<sup>1</sup> And the essence of his unchanging responsibility is that he should be forever fighting his way back to the blessedness and purity of his baptismal state. "All our life we are working ourselves into that condition we had in baptism, and lost by our relapse."<sup>2</sup> The Christian must always be making his painful way towards that point where God, in some irrevocable way, has already won the victory for him by pledging Himself to sin's downfall. But however heartening God's self-involvement in the struggle may be, it in no way diminishes individual responsibility for its outcome. For God's involvement, of which the Sacrament assures us, means that He vanquishes sin insofar as sin is death while leaving to us, and blessing to our use, means and instruments for attacking sin insofar as it is rebellion, and for healing sin insofar as it is sickness. Thus, repentance becomes "a new beginning of our duty, a going from our error, and a recovery of our loss and a restitution of our health"<sup>3</sup>. . .an imperfect, little, growing, uncertain, and hazardous reconciliation: a repentance that is always in production,"<sup>4</sup> always striving "to repair the breach made in the first state of favour and baptismal grace"<sup>5</sup> and therefore offering in this world no permanent rest, no abiding peace, to him who undertakes it.

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 206. The fuller significance for the spiritual life of participation in the Sacrament of Baptism is discussed in Chapter III.

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 358

3 Works, Vol. IX, p. 556

4 Works, Vol. II, p. 358

5 Ibid., p. 372

If it seems from this that man, in some measure, must labour for the forgiveness of his sin, Jeremy Taylor is not troubled by the suggestion and leaves in his own concurrence no slight trace of ambiguity. "Our hopes of pardon are just as is the repentance; which, if it be timely, hearty, industrious, and effective, God accepts."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Taylor feels that the very possibility of a sustained, progressive, growing awareness of God--that is, of a spirituality so organically pervasive of all experience as to be, in fact, a life, rather than a series of feebly connected religious happenings--comes at last to depend upon the uneradicable establishment of a dependable relationship between man's penitent effort and God's forgiving response. "Because man did not remain innocent, it became necessary he should be penitent, and that this penitence should by some means be made acceptable, that is, become the instrument of his pardon and restitution of his hope."<sup>2</sup> Man's sin necessitates a new and stronger bond of union--a very covenant--if his togetherness with God is to be at all preserved.

To this grave necessity God Himself ministers, a part of which ministry is the recognition and honouring of our repentance. And in no minute degree does this acceptance of human effort reflect upon the quality of His justice or

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1 Works, Vol. III, pp. 206-7

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 353

bring into question the reality of His love. For Jesus Christ--that is, God Himself--is "not only the Prophet and preacher, but the Mediator of this new covenant and mercy."<sup>1</sup> Which means, at its bare minimum, that the establishment of this covenant--one part of which is human effort--simply cannot, and does not occur apart from God's own suffering. If this new relationship makes terribly high demands upon man and is, on the human side, painful and costly, we must remember that it is, on the Divine side, a thing of infinitely greater pain and utterly higher cost.

Therefore, if disciplined, obedient, sacrificial, pain-producing human effort is integral to the new covenant, "at no hand let it be made. . . an argument to lessen the influences of the divine mercy."<sup>2</sup> Rather let it be interpreted as God's recognition of the awful truth that it is the quality and prerogative of sin to cause suffering among all who question its authority and seek to diminish its power. Within the covenant relationship that is precisely what God and man are about; and it is therefore only with the help of a naively maudlin, grossly unrealistic concept of sin that any covenanter could interpret the necessity of his own repentant suffering as evidence of incompleteness or diminution in the love of God.

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 354

2 Ibid., p. 361

Quite to the contrary, "the admission of us to repentance is the great verification of His justice, and the most excellent expression of His mercy."<sup>1</sup> For sin, uninhibited and unresisted, surely strangles the life of the spirit. And in His loving, patient determination to bring man's penitent efforts within the realm of creative usefulness, God provides the possibility of release for those who are helplessly imprisoned in the strong grip of that very death. "Whenever repentance begins, know that from thenceforward the sinner begins to live."<sup>2</sup> For repentance is many things, but not least of all a drastic, radical tearing open of one's whole being to make room for Him who transmutes death into Life itself. It is "the great glorification of God," for "he that repents confesses his own error, and the righteousness of God's laws; and by judging himself confesses that he deserves punishment, and therefore that God is righteous if He punishes him; and by returning confesses God to be the fountain of felicity, and the foundation of true, solid and permanent joys. . .and by humbling himself exalts God, by making the proportions of distance more immense and vast."<sup>3</sup>

Which simply means that to repent is to prepare one's life for God's full, redemptive indwelling of it.

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1 Works, Vol. VII, pp. 24-5

2 Ibid., p. 420

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 382

To repent is to hasten the time when God can do in us, one by one, the magnificent thing which always His love makes Him long to do, but which His love of righteousness will not permit Him to complete at a price too low, too easily paid--either by man or by Himself. To repent is not to save ourselves but to confess that we are genuinely ready, at long last, to let God save us, that we are wholly done with our shallow pretence of goodness, and that we are fully cognizant of our poverty's abjectness. To repent is to demonstrate that we are serious contenders and that we really do want God to change us "from sin to grace, from vicious habits to holy customs, from unchaste bodies to angelical souls, from swine to philosophers, from drunkenness to sober counsels."<sup>1</sup> To repent is to do a very great number of things and yet somehow to know that God has done it all, realizing, in the end, that repentance is a great complex of human activity in and through which God, and no other, "lifts up the sinner from the grave to life, from his prison to a throne, from hell and the guilt of eternal torture, to heaven and to a title to never-ceasing felicities."<sup>2</sup>

Within this blessed security of God's splendid concern for our welfare we come to understand that without repentance "we neither could have lived. . .nor have felt any thing of His most glorious attribute."<sup>3</sup> It is no

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 206

2 Ibid.

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 24

mystery that we should grow impatient with walking and without restraint or reservation "run to Him to be made partakers of the mercies of this new covenant, and accept of Him such conditions as He should require of us."<sup>1</sup> no longer insisting upon our own rights, no longer seeking to participate on our own terms. For we find an ever-increasing source of satisfaction in the content of our newly won insight: namely, that it is "the greatest and dearest blessing that God gave to men, that they may repent."<sup>2</sup> If there is no longer any hesitance to embrace those specific disciplines with which repentance confronts us, it is only because there is genuine depth in our realization that "to deny (repentance) or to delay it is to refuse health brought us by the skill and industry of the physician; it is to refuse liberty indulged to us by our gracious Lord."<sup>3</sup>

This awareness thus emerges as an urgency of desire and a steadiness of determination "to take care ut aliquo actu administretur poenitentia, 'that our repentance be exercised with certain acts proper to it!'"<sup>4</sup> These penitent acts had for long been known within the Christian Church as contrition, confession, and satisfaction. And while it is obviously true that Jeremy Taylor uses these words, at least two of which then and now associate themselves in many Protestant minds with the Church of Rome,

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1 Works, Vol. II, p. 354

2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 475

3 Ibid.

4 Works, Vol. VII, p. 465



it is equally true, as we shall see, that he invests them with a distinctly non-Roman meaning. Admittedly, these are actions "from which a man cannot be excused but by great accidents and rare contingencies;"<sup>1</sup> yet there is always something quite gloriously Protestant in his adamantine insistence that they "are not essential parts of repentance, without the actual exercise of which no man in any case can be said to be truly penitent. . . . But they are fruits and significations, exercises and blessed productions of repentance."<sup>2</sup> Although he would consider it highly improbable, Jeremy Taylor would vigorously maintain that it is entirely possible for a man to be truly penitent "though he never lie upon the ground, or spend whole nights in prayer, or make himself sick with fasting."<sup>3</sup>

In exploring these acts 'proper to' repentance it is also important to remember that their separation into different categories is an artificial and quite arbitrary arrangement which may be necessary for the purposes of ordered discussion but which, in the totality of the penitent's experience, has no existence. That is to say, the penitent is simultaneously involved in contrition, confession, and satisfaction. This illumines the fact that in one place<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Taylor can call corporal

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1 Works, Vol. VII, pp. 423-24

2 Ibid., p. 423

3 Ibid., p. 424

4 Works, Vol. III, p. 208



afflictions a part of contrition and in another place<sup>1</sup> call the same actions a part of satisfaction, the point being not that he is inconsistent but that all experience has its own organic indivisibility and that the words with which we describe it always fall short of reality.

Accepting the limitation which this fact superimposes upon our analytical effort we may proceed to the consideration of that penitential sorrow which "is rather odium than dolor," being seated not "in the affections directly, but in the understanding."<sup>2</sup> Thus we make direct apprehension of what was previously implied in a more general context; namely, that sorrow "is not to be estimated by the tears, but by the grief; and the grief is to be valued not by the sensitive trouble, but by the cordial hatred of the sin."<sup>3</sup> For sorrow is, at least initially, "a hatred of sin and detestation of it, a nollition, a renouncing and disclaiming it."<sup>4</sup>

But it is more. This renunciation has positive content just because it looks beyond itself to the One for whose sake it is made. It is "a hatred against sin as being an enemy to God, whom because this repenting man loves and delights in, he also hates whatsoever God hates, and is really grieved for ever having offended so good a God, and for having endangered his hopes of dwelling with

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 465

2 Ibid., p. 427

3 Works, Vol. III, p. 207

4 Works, Vol. VII, p. 427

Him whom he so loves."<sup>1</sup> This compelling, irresistible attraction ennobles that element of a man's contrition which is hatred of sin by revealing to him One, the holiness of whose beauty and the utter selflessness of whose love make sin an appropriate object of hate. Sorrow not only turns away from sin but also, in turning, seeks God. And it can never be called true contrition, never perform its proper work if there is in it "no union with God, no adhesion to Christ, no endearment of passion or of spirit, no similitude or conformity to the great instrument of our peace, our glorious Mediator."<sup>2</sup> True sorrow sees Him and loves Him.

It therefore is creative of obedience to those far limits which sorrow without the love of God in it could never reach. For attrition, which is sorrow without that love, may be able "to produce a dereliction or quitting of our sin, and all the servile affections of frightened or displeased persons."<sup>3</sup> But servility is not obedience, "which only can be effected by love and the affection of sons."<sup>4</sup> . . . He that does not love God cannot obey Him."<sup>5</sup> He can only cower, slave-like, before unknown, unknowable authority, and be afraid. True sorrow aids in man's deliverance from such a fate by evoking and intensifying his love for God--an attachment which "doesnot consist in an act of intuition or contemplation, nor yet directly and merely of passion;

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 437

2 Works, Vol. III, p. 379

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 436

4 Ibid., pp. 436-7

5 Works, Vol. III, p. 379

but it consists of obedience."<sup>1</sup> It is sorrow's prerogative to nourish love, and it is love's nature to obey its vision. So it is that the greatly contrite perceives his sin in its new, terrible dimension and in consequence "would choose to die rather than act it any more."<sup>2</sup> Sorrow thus contributes vitally to the growth in man of a spirituality which breathes deeply the atmosphere of discipline.

Against such a background we may with heightened understanding consider the necessary relationship between contrition and the "afflictive duties of repentance." It is a relationship which exists because true repentance "acts its sorrow, and judges and condemns the sin. . . by judging ourselves, and punishing our bodies and our spirits by such instruments of piety as are troublesome to the body."<sup>3</sup> These 'instruments of piety' encompass a wide range of activity, since "whatsoever is a prudent restraint of an extravagant passion, whatsoever is a direct denial of a sin, whatsoever makes provision for the spirit, or withdraws fuel from the impure fires of carnality, that is an act of mortification,"<sup>4</sup> and stands, insofar as it achieves completeness, as "a testimony of the purity of our purposes."<sup>5</sup>

In some instances, an act of mortification may be

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 196

2 Works, Vol. III, p. 207

3 Ibid., p. 208

4 Works, Vol. II, p. 184

5 Works, Vol. III, p. 21

directed primarily to the control of will or spirit, and in other instances to the control of flesh. But in either instance, whether its main direction be inward or outward, the act of mortification will, as it were, pass through the body and involve the body in the working out of its own high purpose. This tendency towards coalescence is inevitable since the body, as we have seen earlier, "is the shop and forge of the soul, in which all her designs which are transient upon external objects, are framed: and it is a good servant as long as it is kept in obedience and under discipline."<sup>1</sup>

This relationship will lose some of its seeming complexity if we examine in some detail one of the self-afflictive alternatives "which reduces our body to want, our spirits to soberness, our condition to sufferance, our desires to abstinence and customs of denial;"<sup>2</sup> namely fasting. To select fasting as an object of closer examination in no way suggests that it is the most effective, or the most broadly applicable of all the possibilities open to the penitent.<sup>3</sup> But fasting is, in some

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. II, p. 178

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 485

<sup>3</sup> A few of the other possibilities from which the penitent may choose: "...watchings, haircloth upon our naked bodies, lyings upon the ground, journeys on foot, doing mean offices, serving sick and wounded persons, solitariness, silence, voluntary restraints of liberty, refusing lawful pleasure, choosing at certain times the less pleasing meats, laborious postures in prayer, saying many and devout prayers with our arms extended in the fashion of Christ hanging on the cross, which

real sense, a typical and representative penance; moreover, it is an activity to which Jeremy Taylor devotes a great deal of attention, not only as an evidence of contrition, but also in its more general usage as an instrument of mortification, and as an aid to prayer.

Fasting, in common with all the other punitive actions by means of which repentance 'acts its sorrow', cannot be dissociated from the purposes it is intended to serve. "If it be considered in itself, without relation to spiritual ends, (fasting) is a duty no where enjoined or counselled."<sup>1</sup> If we do not exercise this care to insure that our fast "be apt to the end of our designs"<sup>2</sup> it quickly becomes isolated from the main body of the disciplinary effort and assumes a significance out of all proportion to its worth. This is a disastrous distortion, concealing, as it does, the fact that "there is no end to which fasting serves, but may be obtained by other instruments."<sup>3</sup> If it is, in the struggle against some sins, an efficacious technique, it is still only a technique, one among many, and as such is not possessed of anything bordering on infallibility. It cannot stand alone and must

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(Footnote 3 continued)

indeed is a painful and afflictive posture, but safe and without detriment to our body." (Works, Vol. VII, p. 465) One cannot help but feel that there is something authentically autobiographical in the description of the last penance in this list, with its casual reminder that the position is not injurious, although it really hurts!

1 Works, Vol. III, p. 167

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 489

3 Works, Vol. III, p. 170

always take nourishment from "the retirements of religion and the enlargements of charity,"<sup>1</sup> drawing its strength from the disciplinary totality of which it is a part. A true fast categorically denies its self-sufficiency and urges us to "let all our actions also pursue the same design, helping one instrument with another, and being so zealous for the grace, that we take in all the aids we can to secure the duty."<sup>2</sup>

This fact of its dependence and its consequent susceptibility to perversion<sup>3</sup> has its issue in the demand that "all fasting is to be used with prudence and charity, . . .<sup>4</sup> that it be neither in itself unreasonable, nor by accident become criminal."<sup>5</sup> Its own weaknesses necessitate its being hedged about with restrictions. One of these limits the number of persons for whom fasting can be

1 Works, Vol. II, p. 490

2 Ibid.

3 It is interesting that J.T., with all of his admiration for the ascetic piety of the ancient and medieval church, recognizes the extent to which this perversion had sometimes been carried in its history, not just in relation to fasting but also as regards corporal austerities in general. In a typical passage he speaks of "the austerities used by some of the ancients. . .who sometimes rolled themselves naked upon nettles or thorns, shut themselves in tombs, bound themselves to pillars, endured heats and colds in great extremity, chastisements of the body and all ways of subduing it to the empire of the soul; of which antiquity is infinitely full; and of which at last they grew so fond and enamoured, that the greatest part of their religion was self-affliction." (Works, Vol. VII, p. 465)

4 Works, Vol. III, p. 170

5 Works, Vol. II, p. 489



legitimately counselled. It must not "be imposed upon persons that are sick or aged, or to whom it is in any sense uncharitable, such as are wearied travellers; or to whom in the whole kind of it it is useless, such as are women with child, poor people, and little children."<sup>1</sup>

Others among these restrictions insist that fasting must not be permitted to "destroy the body. . .or violate our health,"<sup>2</sup> and that "it must at no hand be made an instrument of scruple."<sup>3</sup> Being potentially the source of so much error, every fast must be entered upon with great care.

This necessity applies not least of all to the determination of the fast's intensity and duration. Normally, "when fasting is intended to serve the duty of repentance, it is then best chosen when it is short, sharp, and afflictive; that is, . .a total abstinence from all nourishment"<sup>4</sup> during such limited time as we, or our spiritual guide, shall appoint. On the other hand, if

1 Works, Vol. III, p. 170

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 489

3 Works, Vol. III, p. 170. This last restriction reflects something of the characteristic closeness with which J.T. observed human behaviour. He knew well enough that "there are some persons so miserable and scrupulous, such perpetual tormentors of themselves with unnecessary fears, that their meat and drink is a snare to their consciences; if they eat, they fear they are gluttons; if they fast, they fear they are hypocrites. . .Every temptation, though resisted, makes them cry for pardon; and every return of such an accident makes them think God is angry. . ." (Works, Vol. IV, p. 110)

4 Works, Vol. III, p. 168

the total circumstance of sin is such that repentance cannot truly act its sorrow except we keep it "always in a readiness, and often to be called upon," then it becomes essential over a much longer period "to refuse a pleasant morsel, to abstain from the bread of our desires, and only to take wholesome and less pleasing nourishment, vexing our appetite by the refusing a lawful satisfaction, since in its petulancy and luxury it preyed upon an unlawful."<sup>1</sup> There are, in other words, stages in the struggle when "it is not an act but a state of fasting,"<sup>2</sup> which only can reveal the genuineness of the penitent's sorrow. "It is but a gentle revenge, and an easy judgment when the sad sinner shall do penance in good meals."<sup>3</sup>

Such is the effortless manner with which Jeremy Taylor moves, almost by instinct, from the discussion of techniques to the discussion of meanings, always performing, as it were, a marriage between principle and detail. The intensity and the duration of a fast, though he may devote seemingly endless pages to their consideration, are not within the sphere of his concern except in the measure that they stand forth as "a testimony of contrition. . . an effect of godly sorrow,"<sup>4</sup> and in so standing contribute, even within the limitations of their apparent insignificance, to the larger penitent effort.

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 168

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 486

3 Ibid., p. 488

4 Ibid., p. 487

That larger effort also involves the confession of sin. And there is a perfectly clear revelation of unwaveringly Protestant affirmation in Jeremy Taylor's introductory reminder that "concerning confession as it is a special act of repentance, the first thing to be said of it is that it is due only to God."<sup>1</sup> This, as we shall see, is not to ignore that delicate intermingling of human lives which sometimes makes necessary, at the exclusively human level, a frank owning of our sin. Nor is it a suggestion that a man "properly consecrated to the ministry" can make no special contribution to confession's fullness and adequacy. But it is a determined keeping of supremely first things in their proper place and perspective. It is an untiring refusal to pretend that sin is anything less than a terrible distortion of the one relationship on the undistorted wholeness of which all else depends. It is an increasing sensitivity to the knowledge in and through which we look beyond the immediate evidences of sin-produced suffering and comprehend, with a painful entirety of being, that God "is the person injured, sin is the prevarication of His laws, He is our judge, and He only can pardon, as He only can punish eternally."<sup>2</sup> This is the awful awareness that brings a man to his knees.

It is also the awareness which constantly keeps confession above the level of mere mechanics. Jeremy

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 440

2 Ibid.

Taylor knew how easily we reduce confession to the complaisant compilation of a list of offences and regard that list as something to be presented to an almighty, but not passionately concerned, keeper of the records; an experience, in consequence, of no fear, no trembling, and no disciplinary content. He also knew of the force with which we are tempted to look upon confession as being, somehow, a human supplement to the incompleteness of God's knowledge of our sins, as if He were not the one who "sees us when we act them," and we were not the ones who "forget them unless He reminds us of them by His grace."<sup>1</sup> Clearly, "that is confession of sins, not that we enumerate the particulars, and tell the matter of fact to Him that remembers them better than we can."<sup>2</sup>

Confession is far more rigorous, penetrating, searching. And not a thing easily done. For while there are in the penitent's reaction to his sin elements of genuine hatred, they cannot be unmixed elements. Even in the moment of exposing him to the Light in which he must die, the sinner "hath yet too great fondnesses for his enemy, his repentances are imperfect, his hatred and his love mixed, nothing is pure, nothing is whole, nothing is easy."<sup>3</sup> If this reality of lingering affection for the sin confessed contaminates the totality of his reaction,

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 208

2 Works, Vol. VII, p. 442

3 Ibid., p. 169

it is none the less there, serving always to remind the penitent that sin is not wholly powerless to reward those who embrace it. Even in the very act of hating sin a man cannot entirely cease to love it, and this impossibility places its confession irretrievably in a context of agonized struggle.

It brings into sharper relief the increasing tension experienced by the man who digs out of his own being the very things which, in some measure, he must always long to keep within himself, and there to nourish them, even though he knows that to do so is to court disaster. This interior pulling of opposed desires in their own directions is the experienced certainty which makes it necessary to speak of the confession of sin as a slow, painful, almost sacrificial "bringing it forth to be crucified and killed."<sup>1</sup> To confess sin is inwardly to be a kind of Isaac who "marches up the hill with the wood upon his shoulders, and yet for ought he knows himself may become the sacrifice."<sup>2</sup>

Added difficulty inheres in the fact that although a man sins ultimately against God alone, he can never do it in a state of isolation from his fellows. In part, the burden of sin consists in the fact that "my brother may be hurt by me, though I have taken nothing from him, nor intended him injury. He may be scandalized by my sin, that

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 442

2 Ibid., p. 169

is, tempted to sin, encouraged in his vileness, or discontented and made sorrowful for my unworthiness and transgression."<sup>1</sup> The inescapable relatedness of man to man makes our sin inevitably influential in other lives, thus directly augmenting our responsibility, and indirectly altering the structure of confession so that it includes those who suffer from the impress of sins which are not their own. "In all these cases it is necessary that we repent to them also; that is, that we make amends not only by confession to God, but to our brethren also," thus doing what we can "that they may not descend into the same state of infelicity."<sup>2</sup> Until it attains to this fullness, the confession of sin must always border on pretence and be held suspect as a thing lacking in the unblemished purity of intention without which repentance can ultimately be no more than make-believe.

It is in terms of contrition and confession so conceived that we sense the uninterrupted continuity with which the struggle towards spirituality grows into that larger complex of affirmative actions which constitute satisfaction, and which bring repentance to its proper and adequate disciplinary fulfilment. If repentance, up to this point, has seemed disproportionately to partake of negative and defensive qualities, such can no longer be

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 444

2 Ibid.



the case. For the efficacy of the penitent effort is indicated not simply by the finality with which the old era ends but rather the unquestioned decisiveness with which the new manifests itself as a force demonstrably irresistible. No contestant who is truly penitent will make premature claims of conquest "immediately upon his returns from sin to the beginnings of good life, but is to begin his hopes and degrees of confidence according as sin dies in him, and grace lives; as the habits of sin lessen, and righteousness grows; according as sin returns but seldom in smaller instances and without choice, and by surprize without deliberation."<sup>1</sup>

Such is the necessity underlying all discussion of particular acts of satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> "True repentance must reduce to act all its holy purposes."<sup>3</sup> It is this that prompts Jeremy Taylor's frequent return to the simple

1 Works, Vol. III, p. 210

2 These are classified by J.T. under the general heading of "sorrow and mourning, corporal afflictions, prayers, alms, forgiving injuries, and restitution." (Works, Vol. VII, p. 465 ff.). As previously pointed out in this chapter, there is a marked lack of precision in establishing the exact limits of the different 'parts' of repentance; prayer, for instance, being sometimes an act of contrition and at other times an act of satisfaction. It is of first importance to re-emphasize that this seeming difficulty arises because repentance has 'parts' only when we think about it analytically. In reality, it is one indivisible experience within which the 'parts', as we call them, have no existence.

3 Works, Vol. III, p. 209

definition of satisfaction as "an opposing a contrary act of virtue to the precedent act of sin."<sup>1</sup> It is a principle which, at the level of practical instruction, never fails to reappear: "to an act of gluttony, let him (the penitent) oppose an act of abstinence; to an act of uncleanness, an act of purity and chastity; to anger and fierce contentions, let him oppose charity and silence; for to hate sin and not to love virtue is a contradiction, and to pretend it is hypocrisy."<sup>2</sup>

In his effort to resist involvement in that hypocrisy, one of the best weapons available to seeking man is his capacity to form habits. That he is a habit-

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 423. The whole point of J.T.'s teaching about repentance in general and about satisfaction in particular will, of course, be hopelessly obscured if we permit ourselves to assume, as many Protestants of our time do almost instinctively assume, that any religious teaching which involves an extremity of human effort is necessarily and at once an overestimate of the extent of man's goodness and an underestimate of the depth of God's mercy. If there is a possible, there is surely no necessary relationship. That J.T., in advocating the necessity of satisfaction, was decisively not teaching some subtle form of the doctrine of justification by works is abundantly clear from the following representative passage: "We need not immerse ourselves in the trifling controversies of our later schools about the just value of every work, and how much every penance weighs, and whether God is so satisfied with our penal works that in justice He must take off so much as we put on, and is tied also to take our accounts. Certain it is, if God should weigh our sins with the same value as we weigh our own good works, all our actions and sufferings would be found infinitely too light in the balance. Therefore it were better to do what we can, and humbly beg of God to weigh them both with vast allowances of mercy." (Works, Vol. VII, pp.464-65)

2 Ibid., p. 143

forming creature is an almost redemptive circumstance, for that quality of his being supports and sustains his attempt to clothe high resolves with the flesh and blood of actual performance. Just as it is the condition and prime characteristic of true penitence that goodness be persevered in, so it is the function of habit to nourish that essential perseverance, and in so doing to strengthen mightily the whole disciplinary structure around which the spiritual life is built.

Basically, this strengthening occurs because of the wondrously interacting reciprocity within which habits and actions are related. "Habits are the daughters of action; but then they nurse their mother, and produce daughters after her image, but far more beautiful and prosperous."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, habit's power creatively to sustain action is great precisely because that power is not intrinsic to itself but importantly derivative from the very being of God. "This rule relies not only upon reason derived from the nature of habits. . .but it relies upon a reason depending upon the nature and constitution of grace; whose productions are of the same nature with the parent, and increases itself naturally, growing from grains to huge trees, from minutes to vast proportions, and from moments to eternity."<sup>2</sup>

This alignment with the elemental power of the God-

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 170

2 Works, Vol. III, p. 186

head means that a morally productive habit, however great the strain it places upon a man in the early stages of its formation, must finally contribute to the ease with which he handles the stuff out of which a spiritual life is made.

"What you obtain at first by doing violence to your inclinations, at last will not be left without as great unwillingness as that by which it entered."<sup>1</sup> It is an unchanging sequence in which "the very exercise of the action does produce a facility to the action."<sup>2</sup> by opening up, gradually, the deepnesses of mind and heart and will to the penetration of God's Spirit and in like measure weakening progressively the grip with which sin has managed to fasten itself to this whole inner realm of being.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. III, pp. 185-86

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 43

3 Although it does not directly concern us here, it is well to remember that one of the spiritual life's inescapable perils consists in the fact that the habit-forming capacity can also be one of the primary instruments of degeneration, bringing a man steadily to that point where he cannot but choose "to be a servant under God's enemy and our own, to be in slavery to sin, subordinate to passion, ruled by chance and company." (Works, Vol. VII, p. 172) But it is, after all, rather obvious that bad habits can be formed. The fact much less obvious, yet of infinitely greater import, is the very one that J.T. perceived with such clarity; namely, that the capacity for habit, when directed God-ward, undergoes something very like a geometric progression in its power to nourish the human quest for fullness of life and truth. It is potentially a greater instrument of good than of evil, just because in the former instance it is harnessed to the power of God Himself.

Therefore, counsels Taylor, "pray often, and you shall pray oftener,"<sup>1</sup> thus describing the certain reward of habitual perseverance in what is perhaps the single act of satisfaction most capable of bringing all the others to their highest degree of perfection. "When you are accustomed to a frequent devotion, it will so insensibly unite to your nature and affections that it will become trouble to omit your usual or appointed prayers,"<sup>2</sup> the habitual element having nourished that instinctiveness which returns a man to the wellsprings of life, and supplies his need, even when there is in him no consciousness at all of thirst. Such "indeed is the perfection of a habit."<sup>3</sup>

As regards the relative efficacy of varied penances, there is in Jeremy Taylor no unyielding legalism, no insistence on this or that technique. Every campaign against sin must be separately planned, the choice of weapons being influenced by the special circumstances attending each penitent's participation in the struggle. In general, the best penances are "not those which most vex us, but such which will most please God."<sup>4</sup> So long as we return to Him--that return being the essence of repentance--"it matters not by what instruments so excellent a conversion is effected."<sup>5</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 185

2 Ibid.

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 170

4 Ibid., p. 488

5 Ibid., p. 471

Not whether the seeker, at any given stage of the struggle, fasts or prays or does alms, but whether through all its changing fortunes he demonstrates his faithfulness by remaining obediently in the embrace of discipline, is the thing of supreme import. He cannot artificially relax the tension of that embrace, but must relentlessly increase it, must "never think the work completed till he dies; not by any act of his own, by no act of the church, by no forgiveness by the party injured, by no restitution."<sup>1</sup> Uncertainties surround him, but they do not finally prevail. It is not a pointless struggle, for his frail but faithful efforts, "those beginnings of pardon which are working all the way, will at last be perfected in the day of the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

And it is then, when Mercy meets and fully mingles with his faithfulness, that he apprehends and is apprehended by that core of truth towards which he has for long been moving; namely, that "the state of repentance is so great an alteration, that in some sense it is greater than the creation; because the things created had in them no opposition to the power of God, but a pure capacity obediential: but a sinner hath dispositions opposite to the Spirit of grace, and he must unlearn much before he can learn anything; he must die before he can be born."<sup>3</sup> That death and that birth ceaselessly inform, undergird, and in large measure constitute, the role of discipline.

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 211

2 Ibid.

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 72



## Chapter Five

### THE ULTIMACY OF HOLINESS

"It is not possible to bear witness to the reality of value without admitting it into one's life; and experience can not simultaneously hold itself aloof from what it embraces."

--DePauley, The Candle of The Lord:  
Studies in the Cambridge Platonists.

"Theology is rather a divine life than a divine knowledge."

"Nothing can be found to be true that is unholy."

--Jeremy Taylor.

Surely there is an arresting paradox in the fact that what Dowden confidently sets down as a primary characteristic of the seventeenth century Puritan mind should be almost equally true of Royalist, Anglican, Bishop Jeremy Taylor. "Religious ideas and religious emotions, under the influence of the Puritan habit of mind, seek to realize themselves not in art, but, without any intervening medium, in character, in conduct, in life."<sup>1</sup> 'Almost equally true' is a necessary qualification. For in the course of this study it has become apparent that Jeremy Taylor never expected religious truth to have its issue 'in character, in conduct, in life' independently of aid from 'intervening' media.

He did, however, contend with great passion, and throughout all his life, for the central insight on which Dowden's dictum rests. Any truth which is divorced from goodness is something less than truth, and more nearly akin to falsehood. Of nothing more than that was Jeremy Taylor certain. Very little that he wrote can be adequately understood if the background of that certainty is removed. In one word--holiness--lies the raison d'etre of his interpretation of the spiritual life.

The task immediately before us then, is that of exploring the concept of holiness within the context of Taylor's own writing. In the effort to approach this idea somewhat

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1 Dowden, E., Puritan and Anglican: Studies in Literature, London, 1900. p. 12

systematically it must be remembered that we are trying to do what Taylor himself never attempted. Systematic thought never was his forte,<sup>1</sup> perhaps because it was never the core of his concern. Moreover, he was especially unsystematic-- a quality which might reasonably be expected in the expression of a belief held with such intensity of feeling-- when writing about the necessity of the good life. Its utter centrality was so apparent and so unmistakably obvious to him that he did not always sense the need for, or perceive the value of, a reasoned exposition. The difficulty arising from this facet of his temperament must be borne in mind.

We may use as a point of departure the fact that Jeremy Taylor's unyielding insistence on the centrality of holiness is always nourished by the recognized possibility of a radical transformation of sinful<sup>2</sup> human nature. Those seekers in whose being the Holy Spirit has become an operative reality undergo a change not simply of degree, but of kind. When that crucial experience, which is both event and process, comes, then "we are esteemed a new creation; and not only changed in manners, but we have a new nature within us."<sup>3</sup> And it is not simply a partial

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1 The men who have studied him intensively, including Heber and Gosse, seem to agree on this point. George Worley's way of agreeing: "the dramatic and poetic qualities were stronger in him than the reasoning power which he neglected." (Worley, G., Jeremy Taylor, p.160)

2 The character and content of that sinfulness are discussed in Chapter II. It is only the possibility of the transformation that concerns us here.

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 347

transformation. No part of human nature escapes, for involvement in this experience means that "we have new affections, new understandings, new wills... 'all things are become new.'"<sup>1</sup> It is this, the transformation's totality and inclusiveness which consistently evokes awe and wonder in Taylor. The moments of his most considered reflection upon it are informed by an atmosphere not unlike that of worship. Its totality "may seem strange; and indeed it is so, and it is one of the great mysteriousnesses of the gospel."<sup>2</sup>

The agent of this change is the third person of the Holy Trinity. Apart from His action the transformation which undergirds the whole quest for holiness must forever remain in the realm of concept. But the concept undergoes a kind of incarnation and moves into the realm of possibility when "He opens the heart, not to receive murmurs, or to attend to secret whispers, but to hear the word of God."<sup>3</sup> Prior to the advent of this experience "we are but an embryo in the regeneration,"<sup>4</sup> a perilous, almost desperately hopeless state in which "we may hear the word of God, but we can never understand it; we hear the sound, but are never the better; unless there be in our hearts a secret conviction by the Spirit of God the gospel in itself is a dead letter."<sup>5</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 348

2 Ibid., p. 347

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 376

4 Works, Vol. V, p. 615

5 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 376

To escape that mere approximation of spiritual reality, and in so doing to come actively within the domain of the transformation which, as we have suggested supports the quest for holiness, necessitates an awareness of the depth and breadth with which the Holy Spirit penetrates our experience. He is not confined to any one, or two, or three specific areas of it, either by His own nature or by ours. His indwelling is a phenomenon of completeness, not of limitation. "By Him we live, in Him we walk, by His aids we pray, by His emotions we desire; we breathe, and sigh, and groan by Him. . . . He reveals mysteries to us and teaches us all our duties; He stirs us up to holy desires and He actuates those desires. . . . He is the beginning and the progression, the consummation and perfection of us all."<sup>1</sup>

This indwelling agent of transformation, by His presence, changes the balance of power in such a way as to create the possibility of a successful struggle for the good life. Without the Spirit, a man's nature is on the side of sin; with the Spirit, that same nature, having become the diametrical opposite of its counterpart in the 'old' man, throws its force against sin. In this new alignment of spiritual energies, man's nature makes its impress for good exactly because of the radical transformation which has transpired within it, the utter newness with which the Spirit invests it. Thus it is possible for

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. V, pp. 615-16



Taylor to affirm that "while the Spirit dwells in us, we cannot sin; that is, it is against our natures, our re-formed natures, to sin."<sup>1</sup>

So genuine, so complete, so thoroughly radical is this essential Christian experience that the redeemed man, in sinning, commits a violence which reaches to the very core of his re-created being.<sup>2</sup> This, for Taylor, explains why that man "is ill at ease when he hath missed his usual prayers, he is amazed if he have fallen into an error, he is infinitely ashamed of his imprudence; he remembers a sin as he thinks of an enemy or the horrors of a midnight apparition: for all his capacities, his understanding, and his choosing faculties, are filled up with the opinion and persuasions, with the love and with the desires of God."<sup>3</sup>

God--as Holy Spirit--is in the redeemed man. Literally and actually there. That is the reality creative of the new balance of power within a man's soul. Never can Jeremy Taylor quite cease to proclaim that certainty, for he understands that without it his call to the good life becomes a mockery filled with nothingness. Understandably, he glories in that certainty. "Whosoever hath the Spirit of God lives

1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 339

2 In a very different context he makes the same assertion: the Day of Judgment will surely be one of great travail and pain "unless we hear God speak now, and do His work, and serve His interest, and bear ourselves in our just proportions, that is, as such the very end of whose being and all our faculties is, to serve God, and do justice and charities to our brother." (Works, Vol. IV, p. 34)

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 340

the life of grace; the Spirit of God rules in him."<sup>1</sup>

Absent from his affirmations are any elements of hesitance or uncertainty or qualification. "He that hath the Spirit, is made alive, and free and strong, and a conqueror over all the powers and violences of sin."<sup>2</sup> The new life is just exactly what the adjective connotes--a thing which had no existence, and which now is, because God has managed a transformation so radical as to give life itself to that which had no being.

Inevitably, this confidence takes him further. For to embrace the possibility of such transformation in human nature is also to believe in the almost unlimited quality of its consequence in human behaviour. If the new life is so fully new and so completely real as Taylor manifestly believes it to be, there must follow a working faith in the perfectability of man. Always he is aware of the necessity for this sequence: "since the Spirit of God is a new nature and a new life put into us, we are thereby taught and enabled to serve God by a constant course of holy living, without the frequent returns and intervening of such actions as men are pleased to call 'sins of infirmity.'"<sup>3</sup>

Not only is he aware of this sequence; he welcomes it. For implicit in it is the beginning of a completely different era in which those who participate in the

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 351

2 Ibid., p. 352

3 Ibid., p. 351

transformation are "entitled to another manner of duration, enabled to do new and greater actions in order to higher ends."<sup>1</sup> Speaking to his fellow participants within the context of that possibility he is confident that as time goes on "we shall find it as hard and as uneasy to sin against God, as now we think it impossible to abstain from our most pleasing sins."<sup>2</sup>

Apparent, therefore, is the need for closer scrutiny of the 'perfection' implied in such affirmations. It is, of course, a matter of plain observation that the redeemed man continues to sin. He is free, but within limits. A new nature has come alive in him, but the old one is still dying and is not, therefore, fully bereft of power. The new man is a conqueror, but daily experience bears sure witness to the continuance of the struggle. The kingdom of sin is overcome, yet still it flourishes. The victory which Taylor so confidently proclaims is by no measure a fait accompli.

Always emergent, therefore, and quite inescapable is this problem of reconciliation: how simultaneously to embrace the concept of perfection and the evidence of experience. Whether or not Taylor effects an adequate reconciliation may be a matter of controversy. But there can be no doubt that he resolves the tension to his own satisfaction. The transformed man is perfect. But--

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 348

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 283

and the qualification is surely a significant one--"it is the perfection of state. . . The perfection of degrees is not yet."<sup>1</sup> When elaborated, this comes to mean that participants in the transformation are perfect "not always, but at some time, not absolutely but in a limited measure; that is, not innocent but penitent, not perfect absolutely but excellently contending, and perfect in their desires, not at their journey's end but on their way thither."<sup>2</sup>

This thought of the 'journey' is indicative. For Taylor finds genuine relevance in the concept of perfection only when it comes into being primarily as present process, rather than future event, as something closely and inextricably related not only to eternity but equally to time. There are, to be sure, some treasures stored up for and available only at the journey's end, but this in no essential way divests the journey itself of meaning. "In this world we cannot arrive thither, but in this life we must always be going thither. . . And as he that commands us to enter into a city from which we are hugely distant, means we should pass through all the ways that lead thither: so it is here. The precept must be given here, and begun, and set forward, and it will be finished hereafter."<sup>3</sup> Thus the focus of his perfectionist concern is not with the 'hereafter' but with 'this life.' Recognition of that emphasis enables us to understand why "evangelical

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 45

2 Ibid., p. 43

3 Ibid., p. 37

perfection is such as supposes a beginning, an infant grace, progression and variety, watchfulness and fear, trembling fear."<sup>1</sup>

So it is that he arrives at a view of perfection which holds ever so seriously to its present actuality without denying or being subtly evasive about the disturbing presence of sinful imperfection in the regenerate man's thought, feeling, and action. The tension created by that presence is undeniable but not of its own power destructive of that 'perfect' state in which the new man lives and moves; for "this perfection is the perfection of men, not of angels," yet it "is perfection all the way, even when it is imperfect in its degrees."<sup>2</sup> The alleged incompatibility is not intrinsic or inescapable for we deal with "the precept of perfection, as it can consist with the measures and infirmities of a man."<sup>3</sup>

The reconciliation thus effected has one great strength to commend it. Jeremy Taylor is always sufficiently aware of human frailty to perceive that a radical transformation of human nature has very little value unless the change can be sustained. There is poor prospect for a continued spirituality if the initially granted resources are not cultured, developed, and through all the vicissitudes of life, renewed. It was to a great extent in this concept of perfection, among others, that he felt this

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 41

2 Ibid., pp. 44-5

3 Ibid., p. 43

very kind of support for the spiritual life to be present. For whatever else it means, the state of perfection so conceived surely indicates that God has done something irrevocable, and that something for the welfare and nourishment of the spiritual effort. Not only has He set in motion a crucially different kind of process but has somehow committed Himself to its continuance.

From this certainty about God's involvement, he comes to another persuasion, equally, and in some respects, more important: namely, that the Christian man who denies or even questions the possibility of perfection is utterly without defence. "Pretend not that God's commandments are impossible: it is dishonourable to think God enjoins us to do more than He enables us to do; and it is a contradiction to say we cannot do all that we can."<sup>1</sup> This note of impatience with those who do not take the perfectionist precept seriously is often sounded; there are times when the impatience grows and almost assumes the proportions of disgust: "because men have habitual aversions from the practices of a holy life, because to do severe actions of religion and strict piety is troublesome to their affections, because contrariant to their wills, therefore it is that they call it hard and impossible; whereas it is not the impossibility of the thing, but their own disaffections, that have heightened the difficulty to a seeming impossibility."<sup>2</sup> More commonly, however, this

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 401

2 Works, Vol. I, p. 121



severity with his fellow-redeemed is tempered by a genuine regard for their common frailties. And this regard not only extracts from his reprehensions any element of self-righteousness but also brings to them a background of compassion: "we disable ourselves by cowardice and intimidating our own spirits, by despairing of God's grace, by refusing to labour, by deferring our endeavours till the weight of our sin grows great, and our strength grows less."<sup>1</sup>

Probably as the consequence of his broad experience as a spiritual guide, or perhaps more significantly from the honest and critical examination of his own inner life, Taylor knew that counsels of perfection are, in fact, usually demoralizing counsels of despair. The more he thought and lived, still the more substantial did his conviction become that if they are counsels of despair it is only because we cannot realize and genuinely believe that "impossibilities enter not into deliberation, but according to our abilities and natural powers, assisted by God's grace, so God hath covenanted with us to live a holy life."<sup>2</sup>

For what, after all, is the intensity of the demand which confronts us? Very great, he answers, but let us remember that we are not commanded to "remove mountains from their places, which we never placed there; but to remove our sins, which we ourselves have made. We are

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1 Works, Vol. I, p. 121

2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 401

not commanded to do things which are not in our power, but such things which God enables us to."<sup>1</sup> In so doing, God never reduces the quest for perfection to a kind of legalism; for although God knows that we can, with His help, "keep the commandments acceptably through Jesus Christ," He is equally aware of that dark inner necessity within which "we cannot keep them so as to be without sin."<sup>2</sup> His intimate knowledge of this framework around and in which our struggle towards perfection must develop has its issue in the fact that "God takes account of obedience not according to the standard of the law and an exact scrutiny, but by an evangelical proportion; in which we are on one side looked upon as persons already redeemed and assisted and therefore highly engaged; and on the other side, as compassed about with infirmities and enemies, and therefore much pitied."<sup>3</sup> Because God has committed Himself in this way to the undergirding of redeemed man's struggle in the direction of a holy life, the element of hopeless futility is extracted from that man's response to God's commandments. Failure or refusal to grasp this redemptive certainty is nothing less than to call in question the holiness of God and finally "to be a patron of impiety."<sup>4</sup>

Scepticism informs one's immediate reaction to a judgment of such severity. For it is not immediately or

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1 Works, Vol. I, p. 121

2 Works, Vol. VII, p. 42

3 Works, Vol. II, pp. 367-8

4 Works, Vol. VII, p. 42

easily apparent that any man who has doubts about the possibility of perfection in this life is therefore an inevitable 'patron of impiety.' But Taylor experienced no doubts about its possibility. Perfection--that is, holiness, the good life--is attainable. Only to the extent that they are embedded in this certainty can Taylor find any coherence or indeed, any sense, in vast portions of the Bible. "To what purpose are all those commandments in scripture, of every page almost in it, of living holily and according to the commandments of God, of adorning the gospel of God, of walking as in the day, of walking in light, of pure and undefiled religion, of being holy as God is holy, of being humble and meek as Christ is humble, of putting on the Lord Jesus, of living a spiritual life--but that it is the purpose of God. . . that we should expect heaven upon no other terms in the world but of a holy life . . .?"<sup>1</sup>

In many different ways and in greatly varied contexts that is the question and the answer to which he insistently returns: "if a holy life be not necessary to be lived, why shall it be necessary to resolve to live it? but if a holy life be necessary, then it cannot be sufficient merely to resolve it unless this resolution go forth in an actual and real service."<sup>2</sup> That same key concern for tangible goodness is manifest in nearly everything he writes. It is

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 402

2 Ibid., p. 389

implicit whenever he thinks about the work of Our Lord, for "this is the end of Christ's passion, and bitter death, the purpose of all His. . . preaching. . . the same body that was broken, and the same blood that was shed for our redemption, is to conform us unto His image and likeness of living and dying, of doing and suffering."<sup>1</sup> Christ's life and work find not just a motif, but a true rationale in the ever emergent holiness of His redeemed.<sup>2</sup> Insofar as the necessity of that holiness be unrecognized or taken lightly, that life and work are in vain.

In a mind which thus evaluates the hortatory passages of Scripture and so analyzes the content of Christ's work, it is almost inevitable that holiness should become a general standard of judgment. In Jeremy Taylor, it becomes the one genuinely reliable index of reality in the spiritual life. In one whose churchmanship was completely acceptable to a man like Laud, whose view of the Sacraments led him to believe that a wise Christian must communicate daily, whose ascetic inclinations enabled him to be the intimate companion of a Franciscan like Francis-a-Sancta-Clara,<sup>3</sup> whose longing for doctrinal purity prompted

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 102

2 In this connection it is surely not without significance that Taylor entitled his long work on the life of Christ The Great Exemplar of Sanctity and Holy Life, according to the christian institution; described etc.

3 Thus known within The Religious Order, his given name being Christopher Davenport. He (Davenport) was also a close friend of Archbishop Laud, and their intimacy was later made one of the articles in Laud's Indictment.

a life-long, exhaustive study of the early Fathers--in such a mind we might with some reason look for and expect a standard other than holiness to be the definitive measure of truth. But any such expectation must remain forever unfulfilled precisely because "this is your characteristic note. Our obedience to the Spirit, our walking by His light and by His conduct. . .that is, if the spirit be obeyed, if it reigns in us, if we live in it, if we walk after it, if it dwells in us, then we are sure that we are the sons of God. There is no other testimony to be expected but the doing of our duty. All things else. . .are but fancies and deceptions, or uncertainties at the best."<sup>1</sup>

This is not for Jeremy Taylor a somewhat fragile abstraction, unable to bear the strain of constant use. If holiness is an ultimate criterion it must, ipso facto, be capable of both general and specific application to all the intermingling areas of a Christian's experience. Of this necessity he is always cognizant; with remarkable consistency he invokes the principle until finally he has subjected nearly the whole body of religious actions and experiences to the common standard of judgment.

Prayer offers an instructive instance. Consider, he says, a man who is seeking, in prayer, the mercy of God. If that man is himself unmerciful, if in the course of his

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 372

traffic among men he is not trying persistently to strengthen the forces of his own pity and compassion, he is only deluding himself. He faces an imminent, rude awakening: "as thy poor brother hath groaned under thy cruelty and ungentle nature without remedy, so shalt thou before the throne of God; thou shalt pray, and plead, and call, and cry, and beg again, and in the midst of thy despairing noises be carried into the regions of sorrow, which never did and never shall feel a mercy."<sup>1</sup> Beyond this agonizing difficulty, there is the added one that the man who does not believe holiness to be a prerequisite of efficacy in prayer is, by that circumstance, impaled on the horns of a vicious dilemma; for "God can never accept an unholy prayer, and a wicked man can never send forth any other."<sup>2</sup>

This does not indicate that most prayers, coming as they do from sinful men, make their way to an unhearing God bereft of all compassion. For as we have indicated earlier, a holy man is one perfect not in degrees, but in state--which for Jeremy Taylor signifies that he is repentant.<sup>3</sup> The only truly 'wicked' man is an unrepentant one. Thus the demand for holiness, in spite of its terrible intensity, is not creative of hopelessness or despair in the prayer life. "God hath so bound the duty of holy living upon us, that without a holy life we

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 56

2 Ibid., p. 57

3 See Chapter IV--"The Role of Discipline."



cannot. . . have the effect of one prayer. But if we be returning and repenting sinners, God delights to hear, because He delights to save us. . . . When a man is holy, then God is gracious, and a holy life is the best, and it is a continual prayer; and repentance is the best argument to move God to mercy, because it is the instrument to unite our prayers to the intercession of the holy Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

That phrase, 'intercession of the holy Jesus,' serves as a reminder that far more than human goodness, of which repentance is the symbol, is involved in true and efficacious prayer. To be sure, no prayer can prevail except it somehow be united to the undergirding strength of Christ's intercessory effort, made on our behalf. That necessity notwithstanding, the emphasis which comprises our immediate concern is that "there is a holiness peculiar to the man, and a holiness peculiar to the prayer, that must adorn the prayer before"<sup>2</sup> it can be united to the intercession of the holy Jesus."<sup>3</sup> By drawing and elaborating on the distinction between a prayer's words and its spirit, he suggests something about the nature of that holiness peculiar both to a man and his prayer. Words may furnish the framework, but the spirit of prayer necessarily consists in holy desires and actions. "Words are not properly capable of being holy; all words are in themselves servants of things; and the holiness of a prayer is not at all concerned in the

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 58

2 Italics mine.

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 48

manner of its expression, but in the spirit of it, that is, in the violence of its desires, and the innocence of its ends, and the continuance of its employment."<sup>1</sup>

When we turn from prayer to other actions of the religious life, holiness loses none of its ultimacy as an index of truth and reality. It is clear enough that the spiritual life can be most effectively prosecuted when it is informed by and charged with the atmosphere of discipline.<sup>2</sup> And yet, for all his preoccupation with the disciplines implicit in the spiritual quest, and in spite of insistence on their centrality, they are never self-contained, never inherently possessed of merit; nor do they ever approach being ends in themselves. If discipline is central, it is a centrality of limitation, not without those qualifications which ends impose upon the means through which they come into being.

One of the lesser, but not unimportant disciplines--meditation--is a case in point. Every reasonable conclusion reached in a period of true meditation will be transferred from the realm of passive speculation to the realm of obligation and duty. In this process of its growth, he does not forget that meditation in its highest forms becomes a beatific intercourse with God. But no matter how immense the glory of that communion, it remains

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1. Works, Vol. IV, p. 345

2 This is the contention of Chapter IV.

only a by-product:<sup>1</sup> it is not the reason for the discipline's existence. "The use of meditation is, to consider any of the mysteries of religion with purposes to draw from it rules of life, of affections to virtue, or detestation of vice;" consequently, any man who does not quickly implement his newly gained insights "loses the benefit of his meditation: he is gone no farther than when he first set out, and neglects the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

More important than meditation in the hierarchy of religious disciplines is mortification. Here again he is categorical in his affirmation that mortification stands in that high place or falls from it on this same issue. There is no evasion, no possible lack of clarity in his forceful statement of the alternatives: "either a habit of virtue is a necessary disposition to the pardon of a habit of vice, or else the doctrine of mortification of the lusts of the flesh, of all the lusts, of all the members of the old man, is nothing but a counsel and a caution of prudence, but it contains no essential and indispensable duty."<sup>3</sup>

As indicated in other portions of this study,<sup>4</sup> Taylor

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1 "Let them (the meditations) be as exalted as the capacity of the person and subject will endure, up to the height of contemplation; but if contemplation comes to be a distinct thing, and something besides or beyond a distinct degree or virtuous meditation, it is lost to all sense and religion and prudence: let no man be hasty to eat of the fruits of paradise before his time." (Works, Vol. II, p. 143)

2 Ibid., p. 135

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 182

4 His interest in ascetic practice and theory is treated in the chapter on "The Role of Discipline."

not only possessed, but in some real measure was possessed by the conviction that a Christian life which does not encompass an earnestly ascetic effort is not being fully lived. The history of Christian thought, of course, offers a considerable body of evidence to suggest that a genuine and valid emphasis on the rightful claims of the ascetic life often becomes over-emphasis, and finally, distortion.

There must have been innumerable occasions and long periods in Jeremy Taylor's life when the possibility of such distortion was imminent. But if at times he did approach the error of serious over-emphasis, it is therefore even more significant that he never did embrace it. The resultant maintenance of proportion is a prime source of his strength as an interpreter of the spiritual life; and that strength emerges precisely because the holiness which is that interpretation's definitive category acts as a constant antidote to the vitiating influence of distortion. Thus it becomes possible for a man who believes so fervently in fasting to look beyond his cherished discipline and there see something even finer: "fasting being nothing itself, but wholly the handmaid of a further grace, ought not to be divested of its holiness and sanctification, and left like the walls of a ruinous church, where there is no duty performed to God, but there remains something of that which used to minister to religion."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. IV, p. 177

Thus it becomes possible for a man who holds that "faith"<sup>1</sup> and repentance are the whole duty of a Christian"<sup>2</sup> to attain the far more penetrating insight that in the disciplinary arch even a key-stone like repentance is not the arch itself. "This is the sum total of repentance: we must not only have overcome sin, but we must after great diligence have acquired the habits of all those christian graces which are necessary in the transaction of our affairs, in all relations to God and our neighbour, and our own person."<sup>3</sup> Repentance, for Jeremy Taylor, is very nearly the most characteristic and surely the most essential activity of the devout life. Indeed, it is for him a thing of genuine, though not intrinsic, beauty; he loves it only because it points beyond itself to the greater, fuller, more commanding 'beauty of holiness.'<sup>4</sup>

In the realm of the spirit, how can one be sure that the positions for which he so passionately contends have in them the very substance of reality and truth? In a

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1 It is worth noting that faith itself, which is not primarily a consequence of the ascetic concern is "not a grace seated finally in the understanding, but the principle that is designed to, and actually productive of, a holy life." (Works, Vol. IV, p. 133)

2 Ibid., p. 394

3 Ibid., p. 392

4 Even in such a manifestly untheological effort as "A Discourse of the Nature and Offices of Friendship," which was originally a letter to Mrs. Katherine Philips, he sustains this attitude: "although I love my friend because he is worthy, yet he is not worthy if he can do no good"--i.e., add to the total goodness of my life. (Works, Vol. I, p. 77)

time when there were so many impassioned contenders for so many varied, indeed, sometimes diametrically opposed, interpretations of the Christian life, it is understandable that this question should become focal for earnest men like Jeremy Taylor. In his effort to face it and honestly to answer it, he explores many possible approaches, but always he seems to feel unstable and insecure until he returns at last to the one unassailable authority--a good life, the sole bit of evidence which he perceives almost instinctively to be incontestable. Until then the ground moves beneath his feet.

In this connection, the nature of his interest in the experience of forgiven sin merits some consideration. If I have sinned against God and plead for His mercy, how, asks Jeremy Taylor, can I be sure that God has forgiven me? No priest, however apostolic the succession in which he stands, can assure me. No doctrine, however universal its attestation in the church catholic, can assure me. No feeling of comfort or relief in myself is trustworthy evidence of any change in God. No disciplinary effort, however severe or however prerequisite to reconciliation or however faithfully endured, can reliably indicate my position. No insistence on this or that attribute of the Divine nature, however satisfying to the mind, is capable of offering the certainty for which I long.

The difficulty, however, does not point to an impossibility. There is here no inference of an unattainable certainty. To experience it, Jeremy Taylor



insists, there is one thing needful: I must make soul-searching response to one demanding query--has my life changed? Is there an observable sequence which passes from sin through prayer and repentance, then on to a transformation of behaviour? Is holiness in me on the increase? "If I have sinned against God in the shameful crime of lust, then God hath pardoned my sins when upon my repentance and prayers He hath given me the grace of chastity; my drunkenness is forgiven when I have acquired the grace of temperance and a sober spirit; my covetousness shall be no more a damning sin, when I have a loving and charitable spirit, loving to do good, and despising the world."<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, it does not end there. Taylor is not insensitive to the negative implication of his criterion. And even though that negation seems to his finiteness suggestive of something utterly loveless in God, he does not evade it. "So long as you live at the old rate of lust or intemperance, of covetousness or vanity, of tyranny or oppression, of carelessness or irreligion, flatter not yourselves; you have no more reason to hope for pardon than a beggar for a crown, or a condemned criminal to be made heir-apparent to that prince whom he would traitorously have slain."<sup>2</sup> There is no shrinking away from a conclusion which seems to him unreasonable--

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 101

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 102

even ugly and revolting. For the hope from which that repulsion springs is precluded by the unrelenting force of his prior certainty that "no hope is reasonable but that which quickens our piety, and hastens and perfects our repentance, and purifies the soul, and engages all the powers of action, and ends in the love of God, and in a holy life."<sup>1</sup>

Such is the measure of his insistence on holiness as the only admissable evidence of reality in some common areas of Christian experience. Recognition of its intensity brings us to that juncture at which we can more appreciatively examine one of Jeremy Taylor's most characteristic and decisive emphasis; namely, that upon zeal. Genuineness in the quest for holiness is importantly determined by the measure of that high and noble passion which informs it.<sup>2</sup> "To endeavour truly, and passionately to desire and contend for more, is. . .the 'fulfilling of the commandments.'<sup>3</sup>

This emphasis inheres in the logic of his position; for as long as holiness occupies the supreme place which Taylor has assigned to it, there can be no relaxation of

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1 Works, Vol. IX, p. 557

2 With the exception of a few preached on special occasions, all of Taylor's published sermons are contained in A Course of Sermons For All the Sundays of the Year; three of these fifty-two sermons are entirely devoted to the subject "Of Lukewarmness and Zeal; or, Spiritual Fervour," and in many of the others it occupies much of his attention. (Works, Vol. IV, p. 143 ff.)

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 56

the effort to attain it without making a critical sacrifice of consistency. Every diminution of that effort's intensity is, in effect, an undermining of the foundation on which the whole structure of spirituality rests;<sup>1</sup> beyond that, it

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- 1 That Taylor genuinely believed this is revealed by his attitude toward those of his Puritan contemporaries who were inclined to equate every emphasis on the necessity of good works with popery. In every such act of identification, he writes, we "not only dishonour our religion, and open wide the mouths of adversaries, but disparage Christianity itself, while we hear it preached in every pulpit, that they who preach good works, think they merit heaven by it; and so for fear of merit, men let the work alone; to secure a true opinion they neglect a good practice, and out of hatred of popery, we lay aside Christianity itself." (Works, Vol. VIII, p. 534) This manifestly does not mean that Taylor had any deep inclination to embrace Romanism, although he was more than once accused of such proclivity. A very great portion of his energies were expended in laying bare the errors of Rome. Unerringly, however, his conviction about the ultimacy of holiness placed his disagreements with Rome in a somewhat unique setting. Without question he did reject the great body of Roman doctrine. But in the last analysis it is clear that he rejected Romanism itself not on doctrinal grounds but because he believed it to be destructive of goodness in human lives. The undermining of holiness was always his starting point: doctrinal objections, though real and necessary, were always secondary. "Indeed, if men would consider things upon their true grounds, the church of Rome should be more reproved upon doctrines that infer ill life than upon such as are contrariant to faith. For false superstructures do not always destroy faith; but many of the doctrines they teach, if they were prosecuted to the utmost issue, would destroy good life. And therefore my quarrel with the church of Rome is greater and stronger upon such points which are not usually considered, than it is upon the ordinary disputes which have to no very great purpose so much disturbed Christendom." (Works, Vol. V, p. 594)

is a disavowal of the goal toward which that spirituality proceeds. Thus it is that zeal takes on such grand proportions in the developing picture. "Do all the parts of your duty as earnestly as if the salvation of all the world, and the whole glory of God, and the confusion of all devils, and all that you hope or desire, did depend upon every one action."<sup>1</sup>

At its bare minimum, the maintenance of this zeal involves constant vigilance against small offences. In part, at least, this explains the near-contempt which he feels for any technique of moral evaluation which permits a man to look lightly upon any relaxation of the essential tension. "What excuse can be made for him that will not so much as hold his peace to please God? what can he do less for Him? how should it be expected he should mortify his lusts, deny his ambition, part with his goods, lose an eye, cut off a hand, give his life for God, when he will not for God lose the no pleasure of talking vainly, and proudly and ridiculously? if he will not chastise his wanton thoughts to please God how shall he throw out his whole body of lust?"<sup>2</sup> Such a man is not seriously contending; he is only playing at the game of spirituality.

This opinion has its corollary in the selection of evidence by which he would detect the onset of spiritual decay. Nothing is more indicative of retrogression than

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 163

2 Works, Vol. VII, p. 99

the absence of that fervour which is retrogression's chief deterrent. "Tediumness of spirit is the beginning of the most dangerous condition and estate in the whole world. For it is a great disposition to sin against the Holy Ghost. . . . There is not in the world a greater sign that the spirit of reprobation is beginning upon a man, than when he is habitually, and constantly, or very frequently, weary, and slights or loathes holy offices."<sup>1</sup> This gradual, listless, unconcerned dissipation of a Christian's passion for holiness is, for Taylor, a most unlovely, almost sickening sight to behold. When that passion ceases to be a puissant ingredient of a man's spiritual life, the loss will probably make him "return to his vomit and his sink. . . . and it is better that he had never known the way of godliness, than after the knowledge of it that he should fall away."<sup>2</sup> Better by far to remain forever insensitive to the beauty of holiness than having felt its impress to turn away, and in turning feel no pain.

Jeremy Taylor could not but realize, on the testimony of his own experience, that the very zeal on which he insists can be the source of terrible distortions and abuse.<sup>3</sup> Often, therefore, he is exercised to establish firmly in men's minds the inseparability of zeal and love. "Remember that zeal, being an excrescence of divine love, must

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1 Works, Vol. III, pp. 186-7

2 Ibid., p. 186

3 For his own uncompromising and unquestionably religious loyalty both to King and Church, zealous Puritans twice imprisoned him during the Protectorate, at Chepstow Castle in 1655, and in The Tower of London in 1658.

in no sense contradict any action of love. Love to God includes love to our neighbour; and therefore no pretence of zeal for God's glory must make us uncharitable to our brother; for that is just so pleasing to God, as hatred is an act of love."<sup>1</sup> Without losing any of its intensity, zeal must emerge within the boundaries imposed by that sense of responsibility which, in human relationships, is the substance of love. If zeal finds expression outside the bounds of that love, a crippling disservice is rendered to that holiness the advancement of which is its sole purpose, and without which it helplessly becomes the instrument of untruth.

The intimacy of this relationship between zeal and love suggests what is implicit, if not always precisely stated: namely, that zeal is far more than enthusiasm, far more than turbulence of emotion, not to be confused with that infinite variety of loveless, ignoble, irresponsible excitements of which man is capable, and for which he has such striking propensity. Intrinsically it is different from all of these. For zeal, although it must finally manifest itself as love for men, has, in the first instance, nothing to do with them. At its base it is pure, agonizing God-thirst. Its presence is unmistakable only when "you. . . desire God's grace with great passion, and an appetite keen as a wolf upon the void plains of the north."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 162

2 Works, Vol. IV, p. 137



When a man's heart and flesh so cry out for the living God, and God becomes the conscious object of his deepest longings, then can he be said to move in the atmosphere of zeal. For this longing which is at once both love and zeal "endeavours forever to be present, to converse with, to enjoy, to be united with its object; loves to be talking of him, reciting his praises, telling his stories, repeating his words, imitating his gestures, transcribing his copy in every thing. . . It can endure any thing but the displeasure and the absence of its beloved. . . (It) is restless till it enjoys God in such instances in which it wants Him; it is like hunger and thirst, it must be fed or it cannot be answered."<sup>1</sup> The zealous man loves not something of his own contriving, but God.

It is precisely from this reality of God's involvement in it that zeal derives its unrelentingness and brings to the quest for spirituality that measure of undiminishing seriousness which otherwise it could not easily possess. Zeal commends itself not as a pleasant aid to holiness but as an unconditioned prerequisite to any attempt at the living of a holy life. Springing up as it does out of our longing for God, this zeal enables us to commit ourselves unconditionally to that attempt, to take it solemnly as becomes true seekers. The longing, being love, is "the greatest thing we can give to God, for it will also give

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 158

ourselves, and will carry with it all that is ours."<sup>1</sup>

Zeal, at last, embraces its object, and in so doing evokes a commitment which is, on the human side, all-inclusive.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing less is the measure and magnitude of the zeal which holiness demands and by which the quest for it is sustained. The potential boundlessness which Jeremy Taylor claims for zeal is but one more signpost. For by its boundlessness zeal unwaveringly points beyond itself to the finer thing it serves. Why, asks Taylor, does Christian man have the capacity for such an intensity of commitment? Only, he answers, because it is one of the tools with which he may carve out that holiness for the attainment of which he exists, and has, therefore, been given a little span of years.

Once again we may find in the life of prayer a lucid indication of the way in which this zeal emerges as an integral part of the movement toward holiness. A prayer which does not 'carry with it all that is ours,' that is, which is not longing and passionate in the sense that we have suggested, is, in effect, no prayer at all. Its innermost nature is contrary to the nature of that One in whom it seeks response. "Fire will easily combine with fire, and flame marries flame; but a cold devotion, and the fire of this altar, can never be friendly and unite

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol. III, p. 156

<sup>2</sup> This totality is discussed more thoroughly toward the end of this chapter.

in one pyramid to ascend together to the regions of God and the element of love. If it be a 'prayer of God,' that is, fit to be entitled, fit to be presented unto Him it must be most vehement and holy."<sup>1</sup> Which, for Taylor, does not mean simply that prayer, to be effective, must be deeply felt;<sup>2</sup> for the vehemence which he commends is evidenced not so much in what the praying man feels as in what he does. Fire comes not only, not even primarily, from the heart but from the will.

To make the insight clearer he resorts to a simple comparison. "Children can sit down in a storm, or in a danger, and weep and die: but men can labour against it, and struggle with the danger, and labour for that blessing which they beg."<sup>3</sup> It is in this labour, and because of it, that prayer develops an irresistible force God-wards. Every degree of holiness achieved is a further measure of prayer's power. Understandably, it is a favourite thought with Jeremy Taylor that if a man wants to hear a moving exhortation to the performance of duty, or if he wants a systematic compilation of his responsibilities

1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 76

2 Indeed, it need not even be spontaneous. He himself held, for instance, that most extempore prayers of his Puritan contemporaries, having in them so little of human labour, bordered always on sacrilege. An Apology for Authorized and Set Forms of Liturgy Against the Pretence of the Spirit (Works, Vol. V, p. 227 ff.) contains his best thought on this point.

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 386

as a seeker after truth and life, he need only examine the content of his prayers. "Let every man study his prayers, and read his duty in his petitions. . . . If we shall turn our prayers into precepts, we shall the easier turn our hearty desires into effective practices."<sup>1</sup>

The man who does not thus see in his own petitions a corollary demand for his own holiness involves himself in a wretched deceit by asking God for something which he does not genuinely want: "thou dost not desire it, unless thou wilt labour for it. He that sits still and wishes, had rather have that thing than be without it; but if he will not use the means, he had rather lose his desire than lose his ease."<sup>2</sup> Surely this uncompromising insistence on holiness as the evidence of sincerity and the condition of efficacy brings prayer into a splendid intimacy with life itself. "By what we require of God, we see what He requires of us."<sup>3</sup> Prayer does not vitiate the demand for holiness, but reenforces it, and in so doing enables holiness to exhibit its ultimacy as an index of reality in the spiritual life. "Prayer without labour is like faith without charity, dead and ineffective;"<sup>4</sup> inherent in this certainty and ceaselessly emerging from it is that clear call to an unending struggle toward the good life which, for Jeremy Taylor, never loses its authenticity,

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 180

2 Works, Vol. VII, p. 386

3 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 75

4 Works, Vol. VII, p. 386

never comes with a lessening impact. In the wholeness of his response to that call a man may know that "religion hath wings and moves upon wheels of fire."<sup>1</sup>

It must be emphasized that this response is a positive, ongoing, aggressive phenomenon in which the one responding is constantly seizing the initiative. The struggle toward the good life can never be prosecuted while it relies upon a strategy of defence. Holiness, however much of discipline and self-denial and other-worldliness it may involve, is decisively not passive and never degenerates into mere negation. Insofar as it attempts to stand upon some middle ground between good and evil, abstaining from the latter but not actively embracing the former, it is not holiness, but hypocrisy, and as such, hateful to God. This "cold, tame, indifferent, unactive religion," this lukewarmness, though not explicitly forbidden by the gospel surely contradicts its spirit. "A lukewarm person does not do evil, but he is hated by God, because he does not vigorously proceed in godliness. No law condemns him, but the gospel approves him not, because he does not from the heart obey this form of doctrine which commands a course, a habit, a state and life of holiness. It is not enough that we abstain from evil, we shall not be crowned unless we be partakers of a divine nature."<sup>2</sup> The goodness required of Christian man cannot "be less than an 'entire'

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1. Works, Vol. IV, p. 155

2. Works, Vol. VII, p. 186

piety, a holiness 'perfect' in its parts, 'wanting nothing' material, . . .contending towards the greatest excellency."<sup>1</sup>

In demanding of man such an extremity of effort, Jeremy Taylor does not force the whole attempt at a spiritual life into a state of dependence on human goodness, as if there were some doubt about God's ultimate sovereignty in all things. There is in the demand no subtle devaluation of the Divine power. There is in it no possible suggestion that the processes constitutive of the spiritual life could for one moment be sustained independently of the Holy Spirit's aid. "Though we cool our thirst at the mouth of the river, yet we owe for our draughts to the springs and fountains from whence the waters first came, though derived to us by the succession of a long current."<sup>2</sup> Unfailingly that background of divine support is there, giving force and direction and purpose to that human effort which would immediately collapse into nothingness without it. And just because that background is utterly and dependably and indestructibly present, Jeremy Taylor seems disinclined to dwell upon it, preferring to urge men onward toward that moral excellence which the background renders possible but which, because it is so importantly and inescapably a human achievement cannot, like the background, be taken for granted.

Thus, while recognizing and glorying in the fact

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 42

2 Works, Vol. V, p. 269



that it is God who "directs our counsels, opens our understandings, regulates our will, orders our affections, supplies us with objects, and arguments, and opportunities, and revelations in scriptis,"<sup>1</sup> Taylor's decisive interest still lies elsewhere. Great and wondrous and redemptive as that fact may be, he is much more concerned to ask and answer the question: when does God do all these things in us and for us? "Most when we most employ our own endeavours, God loving to bless all the means and instruments of His service, whether they be natural or acquise."<sup>2</sup> This answer, in Taylor's mind, imposes no essential limitation on the power of God to indwell a human life as He will, but serves only as a crucial emphasis upon the intense personal responsibility of any man who pretends to take the Christian life seriously. "As no man for his inclination and aptness to the sins of the flesh is to be called carnal, if he corrects his inclinations and turns them into virtues; so no man can be called spiritual for his good wishes and apt inclinations to goodness, if these inclinations pass not into acts, and these acts into habits and holy customs, and walkings and conversations with God."<sup>3</sup>

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1 Works, Vol. V, p. 269

2 Ibid.

3 Works, Vol. IV, pp. 354-55. In quite another connection this entire quotation is of special interest. For it indicates the extent to which his conviction about the ultimacy of holiness influenced his thinking on what was surely one of the seventeenth century's most perplexing religious and political problems; namely toleration. As many scholars of the period

This insistence on action grows steadily and finally brings Taylor to the admission that he would embrace a poorly substantiated doctrine if it were demonstrably creative of goodness; "for better it is to do well even

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(Footnote 3 continued)

have pointed out, the concept of 'toleration' conveyed to Jeremy Taylor and his contemporaries very little of what it now means for us and which, through lengthy usage, we take for granted. It was then a very bold idea that men should be free to say what they thought, in the press and elsewhere, without fear of fine or imprisonment or death at the hands of established authority. Jeremy Taylor addressed himself to the purely religious aspect of this problem, chiefly in his Liberty of Propheying, from the 'epistle dedicatory' of which the following suggestive passage is taken: "If the persons (i.e., those who categorically reject the proposition in which he believes) be Christians in their lives, and Christians in their profession. . .and live in all relations as becomes persons making such professions, why then should I hate such persons whom God loves and who love God. . .because their understandings have not been brought up like mine, have not had the same masters, they have not met with the same books nor the same company. . .for some reason or other which I neither do understand nor ought to blame, have not the same opinions that I have, and do not determine their school-questions to the sense of my sect or interest?" (Works, Vol. V, p. 346). Clearly, Taylor is ready to respect any Christian's differences with himself, so long as that man is possessed of the holiness which is, for Taylor, incontestable evidence of spiritual reality. The same essential emphasis is found in another typical passage: "When a proposition goes no further than the head and the tongue, it can carry nothing with it but his own appendages, viz., to be right or to be wrong, and the man to be deceived or not deceived in his judgment: but when it hath influence upon practice, it puts on a new investiture, and is tolerable or intolerable according as it leads to actions good or bad." (Works, Vol. VI, p. 162).

upon a weak account, than to do nothing upon the stock of a better proposition."<sup>1</sup> Invariably, he anathematizes faineance for in his mind it augurs paralysis, decay and certain death for the spiritual life.

Inseparable from this emphasis and in some sense proceeding from it is another, equally characteristic and perhaps more significant aspect of Jeremy Taylor's concern for holiness; namely, its totality, its inclusiveness, its own inner compulsion to leave untouched no facet of the seeker's thought or feeling or, most especially, his action. In the measure that religion breathes deeply the atmosphere of true holiness it is impatient with incompleteness; it "snatches even at little things; and as it teaches us to observe all the great commandments and significations of duty, so it is not willing to pretermitt any thing which, although by its greatness it cannot of itself be considerable, yet by its smallness it may become a testimony of the greatness of the affection which would not omit the least minutes of love and duty."<sup>2</sup> Such is the totality of holiness.

The necessity of this wholeness informs his thought not just in periods of theorizing but also, as one might expect with a man more than normally inclined to test every proposition by its influence on behaviour, in those moments when he is giving the most practical of instructions for the conduct of the religious life. When, for

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 534

2 Works, Vol. II, p. 485

instance, a Christian man washes in the morning, he is not simply to go mechanically through the motions; rather he is to find in that activity an occasion for communion with his Maker. "At washing your hands and face, pray God to cleanse your soul from sin."<sup>1</sup> Or again, a Christian man awakening in the middle of the night is to look upon his sleeplessness not as a source of irritation but as a splendid opportunity to strengthen his hold on God. To that end, Taylor sets down in considerable detail a series of meditations, chiefly on Biblical incidents, to be used throughout the period of wakefulness.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, with the daily activity of dressing: "in putting on your clothes, pray Him to clothe your soul with the righteousness of your Saviour. . . For religion must not only be the garment of your soul, to invest it all over; but it must be also as the fringes to every of your actions, that something of religion appear in every one of them. . ."<sup>3</sup>

The totality which such actions manifest inheres in the very will of God. It is not a sort of religious cloak superimposed on certain areas of life which have essentially nothing to do with Him. It becomes us to remember, and to adore the goodness by which "God hath not

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1 Works, Vol. VII, p. 612

2 Works, Vol. III, pp. 41-2. Among the Biblical incidents which constitute the subject matter of these meditations are: "Jacob's wrestling with the angel;" "the angel passing over the children of Israel and destroying the Egyptians for disobedience and oppression;" "the agonies of Christ in the garden, His sadness and affliction all that night."

3 Works, Vol. VII, p. 612

only permitted us to serve the necessities of our nature but hath made them to become parts of our duty; that if we, by directing these actions to the glory of God, intend them as instruments to continue our persons in His service, He, by adopting them into religion, may turn our nature into grace, and accept our natural actions as actions of religion."<sup>1</sup> If there exists any separation of life into religious and less religious and non-religious categories, that separation is artificial. Life has its own indivisibility, given by God in His mercy, sustained by man in his goodness.

This means that the sanctuary's boundaries are being extended until they include the whole of life and permit holiness to emerge in all the traffic of its common days. The locale of the quest for holiness has grown until now it is as large as life itself, and inevitably so, for now we move in the direction of a holiness which is "like Christ's seamless coat, all of a piece from the top to the bottom. . .not a little knot of holy actions scattered in our lives, and drawn into a sum at the day of judgment."<sup>2</sup> No longer do we look upon religion "as our trouble and our hindrance, nor think alms chargeable or expensive, nor our fastings vexatious and burdensome, nor our prayers a weariness of spirit"<sup>3</sup> just because we perceive inwardly that

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1 Works, Vol. III, p. 8

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 258

3 Works, Vol. IV, p. 501

deep inseparability in which religion is life. By the same measure we no longer feel compelled to regard our daily labour as a grim necessity somehow to be got through with. For within the experience of inseparability we have learned that "not only the precise virtue of religion is the divine service, though by propriety it hath obtained the name: but the doing all our duties, the works of our calling, all charitable ministries, all useful trades, all the graces of the Spirit expressed in actions and obedience, is the service of God, and of one it cannot be said, it is better than another."<sup>1</sup> To be sure, "there is no one minute of our lives. . .but we are or may be doing the work of God, even then when we most of all serve ourselves."<sup>2</sup> Such are the origins and implications of a holiness coterminous with life itself; a holiness which, by the closeness of its identification with life's totality makes another telling contribution to Jeremy Taylor's claim that holiness stands alone in being faultlessly indicative of reality in the spiritual life.

That faultlessness cannot, of course, be claimed for holiness unless it is manifestly the prime source of efficacy in the attainment of religious knowledge. Jeremy Taylor was never sufficiently inclined in philosophical directions to make a systematic approach to this problem. For in his mind the ultimacy of holiness as an epistemological technique was so startlingly obvious as to require

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1 Works, Vol. X, p. 227

2 Works, Vol. III, p. 8



no systematized demonstration. That the way to know God is to be a good man was, for him, so self-evident a truth that to state it, and expound it, seemed always to be a superfluity, sometimes a presumption. The intensity with which he felt it generally led him to the conclusion that its defence was unnecessary. The result is that in nearly all his writing, this definitive conviction is very infrequently given an explicit statement.

In at least one published work, however, there is no possible lack of clarity on this point.<sup>1</sup> "If the kingdom of God be in us, then we know God, and are known of Him; and when we communicate of the Spirit of God, when we pray for Him, and have received Him, and entertained Him, and dwelt with Him, and warmed ourselves by His holy fires, then we know Him too. But there is no other satisfactory knowledge of the blessed Trinity but this; and therefore whatever thing is spoken of God metaphysically, there is no knowing of God theologically, and as He ought to be known, but by the measure of holiness."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Via Intelligentiae, a sermon preached to the University of Dublin after Taylor had become Bishop of Down and Connor as well as vice-chancellor of the university, is of all his published works the only one directly concerned with this problem. This sermon was designed to show "by what means the scholars shall become most learned and most useful." The choice of text--'If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' (John 7:17)--is suggestive both of the strength and the weakness which inhere in Taylor's approach to and solution of the problem, insofar as it was for him at all problematic. (Works, Vol. VIII, p. 359 ff.).

2 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 387

This opens the way for Taylor's realization of the crucial fact which finally comes to be of first importance to him; namely, that high religious knowledge can be the sure possession of any man who genuinely wants it and will pay its price. The well trained, the scholarly, the very intelligent, the most gifted have no priorities here; for "a good man, though unlearned in secular notices is like the windows of the temple, narrow without and broad within: he sees not so much of what profits not abroad, but whatsoever is within, and concerns religion and the glorifications of God, that he sees with a broad inspection."<sup>1</sup> Such a man, however plain and ordinary a creature, by means of that perspicacious inwardness which his goodness brings to birth, "shall understand more by his experience, than the greatest clerks can by all their subtilties, the commentaries of the doctors, and the glosses of inquisitive men."<sup>2</sup>

The good man's knowledge of God is, in other words, the knowledge of experience, not of speculation. As such, its validity is greater because its penetration is deeper. Taylor does not deny that much can be known about God without undertaking to live holily. But any knowledge obtained outside the quest for holiness always leaves us, at last, in an atmosphere of undiminishing remoteness from the One we seek to know. It is never to be confused with the good man's more nearly immediate and unquestionably more intimate

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 382

2 Ibid., p. 47

apprehension. Apart from the passionate pursuit of holiness we may see God only at a distance, and even then "nothing but the shadow of Him, and in that shadow we meet with many dark appearances, little certainty, and much conjecture."<sup>1</sup> This groping in the shadows produces some relevant information concerning God. But a good life, exercising its own inalienable prerogative, transmutes that information into knowledge by evoking in man the love which makes knowledge possible. "There is in the things of God to them which practice them a deliciousness that makes us love them, and that love admits us into God's cabinet, and strangely clarifies the understanding. . . . Then we shall hear what we never heard, and see what our eyes never saw; then the mysteries of godliness shall be opened unto us, and clear as the windows of the morning."<sup>2</sup> Such God-knowledge is at once the certain consequence and final glory of holiness.

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1 Works, Vol. VIII, p. 379

2 Ibid.

It is quite impossible to pretend that any re-  
lections on the meaning of this study can be set down in  
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for himself; but Chapter Six, true that the problem of under-  
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were desirable.

## Chapter Six

That this is so tells more about Henry Taylor than  
it does about me. **CONCLUSION** In the study of his work  
would produce such an effect. For Taylor's work is a  
genuine to heighten one's awareness of the fact that the  
spiritual life is, in the best sense, a personal affair. It is  
the sense that the living of it is a personal affair, and that  
perception where honesty about oneself leads to a  
moral ideal and even within the realm of moral action.  
ment. Discontentment with the present state of the  
soul along with the steady emergence of a new vision  
that they must be religiously reformed and they can be re-  
fined to Christian experience, and they are brought to it  
in a degree that the man-Christian can never reach and  
to experience the new vision until they are brought to  
even into the realm of all thought and feeling to an  
agonize and doubt and then frequently to despair. It is  
to be a realist about one's sin and in being so to suffer.

It is quite impossible to pretend that any reflections on the meaning of this study can be set down in an atmosphere of strict objectivity. In the body of the study every effort has been made to let Jeremy Taylor speak for himself; but it is quite true that the process of understanding him has been a decisive part of my own personal religious experience. In consequence I cannot write these final pages in a mood of detachment--even if such a mood were desirable.

That this is so tells more about Jeremy Taylor than it does about myself. Any intensive pursuit of his work would produce such an effect. For it is a part of his genius to heighten one's awareness of the fact that the spiritual life is, in the best measure of things, a desperately personal affair. Desperately personal, that is, in the sense that the living of it occurs at those levels of perception where honesty about oneself ceases to be a moral ideal and moves within the realm of actual attainment. Discontentedness with the presence of lies in the soul along with the steady emergence of undying conviction that they must be relentlessly rooted out may not be confined to Christian experience, but they are integral to it in a degree that the non-Christian can never know. And to entertain these notions until they are inextricably woven into the fabric of all thought and feeling is to agonize and doubt and not infrequently to despair; it is to be a realist about one's sin, and in being so to suffer.



Jeremy Taylor sees this and does not shrink back, but accepts the vision; it is almost instinctive with him and he always gives it free play, never hesitates or turns away when it speaks of the price which individuality exacts as payment for its own existence in the soul of man. He knows that the personal factor, however full of blessedness, is also the source of a fear and trembling whose power it is to shake the very foundations of the inner life. Indeed, the personal factor is not simply prominent: it is definitive for and in the experience of Christian man. Jeremy Taylor understands that a man has not begun to think or feel or will his way into any single facet of Christian truth until he conceives it in the frightening terms of his alone-ness with God. Only so does the seeker keep from transmuting doctrines into irrelevant platitudes; only so can he become intimate both with the magnitude of his personal crisis and the wholeness of its God-intended resolution.

But if Taylor comprehends the centrality and pervasiveness of the personal he never supposes that it is sought, or given, in a state of separation from other men. That is to say, his whole concept of the personal in religion is redeemed from sentimentality by an experience of the redemptive milieu in which a man receives the breath of life and becomes a living, individual soul: namely, the Church. It is not for man to make the rules or build the framework for his quest; in the church those rules and that



framework are simply there. They are the divinely given conditions of his participation and as such, the inscrutable evidence of Wisdom and Mercy without limit. The Church, by its very presence in their midst, reveals to men what they are naturally disinclined to believe and in some deep sense unable to know--that the personal in religion has essentially nothing to do with isolation and everything to do with community. In any way to ignore the Church is to depersonalize the religious enterprise and also to cut at the very roots of fellow-feeling; it is a foolish, callous refusal to face facts which has its issue in the progressive closing up of all those outlets which connect separate lives with one another and all lives with Life itself. Isolation from the divinely established community of believers soon enough becomes isolation from God, and such is the tragedy of a churchless spirituality. It is also the context in which Jeremy Taylor's churchmanship takes on power and relevance.

It is but one of the many instances in which one is aware of his considerable capacity to probe about within a paradox, handling the realities of which it is made until he emerges with some creative impetus to the ongoing processes of the Christian life. He does this not by accepting and emphasizing only one term of a paradox, nor by an oversimplification which misses the truth in both terms. Rather, we are here in touch with one who goes to the very core of contradiction, there embraces both terms, and does

it with such passionate purity of intention as to evoke from them a new aspect of truth nobler than either of the old terms could claim to enshrine.

At no point is this clearer than in his view of the Eucharist. All the Christian forms--and supremely this one--he understood to be God's specially chosen meeting place with man, the locale of their finest nearness to each other. As such, the forms are vital, which is to say, life-giving. Yet he also grasped the other side of the paradox--that a thing which conveys Life, however blessedly necessary, cannot be Life. Faced with this seeming contradiction, Christians have always been tempted to move decisively in one direction or the other, to the constant impoverishment of their life in God. The claim made for Jeremy Taylor earlier in this study and here restated is that he somehow managed to move in both directions and that in so doing he indicated a third, and perhaps truer way to go.

On the one hand, his views of the Eucharist are saved from the shallow memorialism beloved by those who have never grasped, nor been grasped by, the vitality of the Christian forms. On the other hand, Taylor's view never degenerates into the morally impotent sacramentalism of those who have failed to see that the vitality of forms is somehow counterbalanced by a limitation upon their efficacy arising out of the very nature of all true religion. Not, of course, with perfect consistency but on the whole with

remarkable clarity and always with genuine affection, Jeremy Taylor is at home with the truth on both sides of the question. In consequence, he is at once a profound believer and an equally profound disbeliever in the Sacrament's necessity. He knows that everything depends upon it and that nothing depends upon it; that in one moment he must look upon it as the framework of very Life, in the next moment as an empty husk, and that he must do so precisely because, in the grace and goodness of Mystery, it is both of these. That seeking man should discipline himself until he sees it in this, its wholeness, is one of the many sacrifices inherent in his quest.

These sacrifices are many in number and quality, as has been suggested in the chapter on discipline. All of them lie close to the centre of Jeremy Taylor's most penetrating concerns. It surely must be assessed as one of his greatest strengths that he refurbishes, for those of us who have ceased to see in it the glow of truth, the whole concept of the religious life as one of severe and determined discipline. He is well prepared to do this by his grasp of what we have called the personal factor and by his abiding convictions about the Church. The former brings to his disciplinary counsel an atmosphere of compassion, a constant reminder that every attempt at discipline is, above all, an experienced relationship of yielding and response between a man who yearns for God and a God who longs for closeness with his creature.

The other body of convictions--those about the Church--keeps his disciplinary counsel from ascetic excess. For the Church is, among other things, the custodian and servant of the living Word of God, as well as the inheritor of a great tradition of piety. To both of these the seeking Christian submits himself in obedience and humility, in order that his disciplinary embrace may continuously partake of truth, thus being productive of good and genuinely indicative of the creativity of struggle.

For any interpretation of the Christian life which does not discover and maintain the centrality of the personal conflict, Jeremy Taylor has frank contempt. His finished drawing of Christian man is the picture of an embattled struggler who is forever fighting against forces in himself and in his world which militate fiercely against the fulfilment of his quest. To be sure, he is never fighting alone. There are other seeking members of the believing community, both in his past and in his present; they nourish and sustain him. The Church is there, always near, with its Scriptures, Sacraments, liturgies, and priesthood to renew and uphold and direct him. Supremely, there is in and above and beyond his struggle the Lord God Himself, the Lord's Christ, and their Holy Spirit; they are his God to the very end. But all of this wondrous support does not alter the primary fact that he, Christian, is a creature of struggle. If, therefore, he lives the highly



disciplined life it is only because in so doing he is true to his own nature as a Christian, and so makes possible the realization of his destiny. It is this that underlies all Jeremy Taylor's thought and feeling about what has been called in this study, the role of discipline.

It is not a role which makes less magnificent the role of God. There is in Jeremy Taylor no fear that man's intense disciplinary enterprise will detract from the sheer immensity of God's redemptive activity. Taylor does not believe, as some leaders of contemporary Protestant thought appear to believe, that the fullness and finality of Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection are vitiated because man exerts himself greatly in partaking of their benefits. God is not glorified by a view which leaves man with little or nothing to do in the processes constitutive of salvation. In Jeremy Taylor's reading of life God is truly glorified when a man, in the spirit of discipline, knows he must do everything he can to work salvation out for himself, yet also knows in the extremity of his exertion that he has, in fact, done nothing at all. Such a man, having exhausted the power which men are always tempted to attribute to themselves and having seen it in all of its stark futility, is prepared to perceive the boundlessness of the thing which God has done for him and is always longing to do in him through Jesus Christ the Lord.

The portions of this study which have attempted to explore something of what Jeremy Taylor thought about the

Church, its Sacraments, its liturgies, its discipline, and the import of all these in the personal experience of seeking man should, when considered in retrospect, make more understandable the nature of his relationship to later movements of thought in his own Church of England. There can be no substantial doubt that the Oxford Movement was in many respects a return to and rediscovery of the Caroline Anglo-Catholic divines. "One thing, at any rate, is clear historically," in the judgment of F. L. Cross, "and that is that the specific temper of the devotional life of the early Tractarians was in no small measure due to the direct influence of seventeenth century models."<sup>1</sup> And Newman himself indicated in Tract No. 71 that Jeremy Taylor was one of those models: "Nor could a more acceptable or important service be done to the Church at this present moment than the publication of some systematic introduction to theology, embodying and illustrating the great and concordant principles and doctrines set forth by Hammond, Taylor, and their brethren before and after them."<sup>2</sup>

The reason for Jeremy Taylor's impress on those who led the Oxford Movement is plain and forthright: theirs was the fellowship of kindred minds. They cherished and served the same aspects of truth: "the renewed emphasis on the Church as a divine institution, on the continuity of the

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1 Cross, F. L., The Oxford Movement and the Seventeenth Century, London (SPCK), 1933, p. 79

2 Cross, F. L., op. cit.; quoted on p. 9



Catholic tradition as overleaping the more radical and destructive elements of the Reformation, the enrichment of public worship, and the deepening of individual religious experience."<sup>1</sup> All of these concerns, set down by Paul Elmer More as the common denominator of Tractarianism, had weighed heavily on the spirit of Jeremy Taylor two centuries earlier. But none so heavily as the last--'the deepening of individual religious experience.' This is the area of man's quest in which Taylor goes to the root of things and makes his mark. The creative exploration of those hard places where the spiritual life must be lived is at once his first love and his true forte.

Not only in the best tradition of his own Church of England but also in the delicate intricacy of his own temperament there was much to nourish this passion for the full living of the spiritual life. In addition to the facts and quality of his own suffering--considered more completely in the introductory chapter--there were "his fondness for casuistry, his profound reverence for antiquity, his natural love of the picturesque and poetical features of religion, its ascetic severity on the one hand, its august ceremonial on the other. . . ."<sup>2</sup> These inclinations were among the most potent in the deep currents of his thought. And they account, in part, for what many critics have recognized to

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1 More, P. E., "The Spirit of Anglicanism," an introductory essay to Anglicanism, etc., London (SPCK) 1935, p. xxx.

2 Worley, G., op. cit., p. 68.

be his doctrinal ambiguity. "His whole drift is obvious enough; but in details he is apt to present the same difficulties as the Book of Common Prayer. . . that is, in leaving many questions unsettled for the exercise of human ingenuity."<sup>1</sup> One result is that Anglo-Catholics and extreme Protestants, along with many others in between, have claimed Taylor's support for many of their cherished notions. But if his doctrinal statements lack precision it is largely because, being a man of the temperament we have indicated, dogmatic formulation could never claim the best that was in him. Carefully, and with a high sense of mission, he saved that best for the moments when he could spend it freely on the cure of souls.

There is, however, one point of abiding importance on which Jeremy Taylor unfailingly leaves probabilities behind and stands on the firm ground of sure conviction. It is intimately related to his concept of the disciplined life. Quite simply stated this certainty is that the Christian life must be a life of obvious goodness, of measurable holiness, of steadily increasing likeness unto Jesus Christ, its Lord and Giver. There is, of course, an obvious sense in which all Christians accept this necessity and for whom it is axiomatic. But it is also true, unfortunately, that there has always been a tendency in the Christian Church to undermine the necessity, to evade it, to obscure the plain realities of Scripture and tradition which create it, and

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<sup>1</sup> Worley, G., op. cit., p. 171.

in so doing irreparably to weaken the impact of Christian people upon their world, the world for which Christ died.

In particular, there has always been in the Church--as there still is to this day--an interpretation of the nature of faith in Jesus Christ which, in rightly emphasizing the utter redemptive totality of Christ's person and work, wrongly infers from this totality a belief that it somehow excludes demonstrable and growing goodness from the continuing act in which man perceives ~~this totality~~ and makes his response. It is a view which makes proper emphasis upon the abjectness of our sin and the wholeness of Christ's ministry to our need; but it does not admit that a decisive (and soundly Biblical) part of that ministry is the divine gift of victory over sin, a victory in the here and now which manifests itself in the incontestable evidence of holy living.

The human goodness of which we are speaking is wholly the creation of the Triune God, but it does not follow that man has no part in the creative process by which it comes into being, that he has no responsibility for its penetration into and its growth out of his own thought and feeling and, above all, his action. To deny that he has this responsibility and to maintain that he has believed on Christ when there is no growing body of tangible evidence to show that he has so believed is, for Jeremy Taylor, to rob faith of its noblest, truest meaning and to take from the work of Jesus Christ its painfully won completeness.

In holding so tenaciously to this conviction it seems clear enough that Jeremy Taylor stood within the best tradition of Anglican thought and that he served the Church of England perhaps more faithfully than she has fully realized. "If we are looking for a single term to denote the ultimate law of Anglicanism," writes Paul Elmer More in his effort to interpret the Anglican via media, "I do not see that we can do better than adopt a title which offers itself as peculiarly descriptive, despite the unsavoury repute it may have acquired from its usurpation by certain modern sects of philosophy; I refer to the title 'pragmatism.' . . . If the Anglican differs from the Romanist or the radical Protestant, it is because more definitely and consciously than either he justifies his belief by the pragmatic test of experience, namely: 'Does it work?' It is not that he rejects authority for an unchecked individualism; he sees that his personal experience is no more than a fragment of the larger experience of mankind and must be controlled at every step by that accumulation of wisdom which is the voice of the Church. What he rejects is the Absolute of authority based on a priori theories of infallibility. Rather, looking within and without, he asks the consequences of believing or not believing. How does acceptance of the dogma of the Incarnation work out in practice? Does faith bring with it any proof of its objective validity?"<sup>1</sup>

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1 More, P. E., op. cit., pp. xxxii, xxxiii.

This study has attempted to illumine Jeremy Taylor's overmastering conviction that without such proof faith in Jesus Christ cannot honestly be said to exist at all. This is not a comfortable thing for any seeker after Life to ponder. But it has in it the stuff of which truth is made. With good reason, therefore, we can be profoundly grateful to Jeremy Taylor for speaking of it so clearly, so insistently, and with such genuine regard for our common welfare.

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(Note: The above edition of Taylor's complete collected works is used exclusively in the body of the thesis. Since the quotations are identified only by volume and page number, there follows a list of Taylor's most important individual works in the order of their appearance in this edition.)

## Volume I:

Clerus Domini, or a discourse of the office Ministerial.  
Discourse of the Nature and Offices of Friendship.  
Rules and Advices to the Clergy of the Diocese of Down and Connor.  
The Gate to Heaven a Strait Gate.  
 (This volume also includes Bishop Reginald Heber's 'Life of Jeremy Taylor' and Bishop Rust's Funeral Sermon on Jeremy Taylor.)

## Volume II:

The Great Exemplar of Sanctity and Holy Life, According to the Christian Institution, Described in the History of the Life and Death of the Ever-blessed Jesus Christ, The Saviour of the World.

## Volume III:

The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living.  
The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying.

## Volume IV:

A Course of Sermons for all the Sundays in the year.



## Volume V:

Of The Sacred Order and Offices of Episcopacy.  
Apology for Authorized and Set Forms of Liturgy.  
Of The Reverence Due to the Altar.  
Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying.  
A Discourse on Confirmation.

## Volume VI:

The Real Presence and Spiritual of Christ in the  
Blessed Sacrament Proved against the  
Doctrine of Transubstantiation.  
Dissuasive From Popery.  
Second Part of the Dissuasive From Popery: in  
Vindication of the first part, and further  
reproof and conviction of the Roman errors.

## Volume VII:

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Deus Justificatus, or A Vindication of the Glory  
of the Divine Attributes in the question of  
Original Sin.  
Correspondence with Warner and Jeanes.  
The Golden Grove, or a Manual of Daily Prayers  
and Litanies fitted to the Days of the Week;  
containing a short summary of what is to be  
Believed, Practised, and Desired.  
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## Volume VIII:

The Worthy Communicant.  
Supplement to Sermons for All Sundays of The Year.  
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